Bigger than Law
Righting ancient wrongs at Standing Rock

Paint the Sky
Artful kites lift more than just paper

Rick Bass Afield
It’s not about the birds. It’s what you’ll do to find them.

In Her Time
Actor Lily Gladstone wows critics and audiences

Taming the town at Tongue River Reservoir
That famous bar at Dixon
Bozeman lights up with lasers
Fiction by Shawn Vestal
DINNER
SO DARN GOOD
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Open Letter to President-elect Trump

It looks like your fears of a rigged election didn’t pan out. You won.

Lots of people from both parties thought you didn’t really want this job, that you were running on pure vanity or to mock the system. None of that matters now, of course. Your strategy worked.

Like half the country I supported your opponent, but I accept your victory amidst the mixture of crowing and hand-wringing that fills the airwaves and social media these days, noise that will fade soon enough, as the real work of running this country begins.

My voice is one from the hinterland, but maybe you’ll listen to some of us in flyover country. The Cubs won the World Series, so anything can happen, right?

We Montanans treasure our public lands. They fuel our economy and provide solace and clean water and breathing room. I hope you will stick to the promise you made in January, that privatization of federal land in the West won’t happen on your watch. Please, appoint wise people to run the departments of Interior and Agriculture. They affect our daily lives here. We’re not just voting blocks, abstractions.

We have lots of arguments about wildfires and logging and road closures, and they’re important, but we can’t even have the discussion if the lands go private. So let’s make sure public voices can be heard in issues that affect our water and our air, our wildlife and our wallets.

And keep in mind that Montana gets about $1.50 for every tax dollar we send to D.C. It funds our roads, pays wages, supports our seniors and finances schools. Lots of people don’t like to acknowledge it but one can argue that federal spending constitutes the biggest industry in our state, and almost everybody gets a chunk of it. So be careful about how you squeeze the budget.

You’ve been pretty vague about how you will replace Obamacare, which needs some serious work. Middle-class, self-employed, reasonably healthy people (like myself) have taken it in the shorts under this plan. But millions with bad diseases or injuries have benefitted. Montana isn’t a wealthy state. Keep us in mind. Find a system that works better. Some of your ideas made sense, like forcing the pharmaceutical industry to the bargaining table.

Don’t waste time prosecuting Hillary Clinton or suing all those women who accused you of giving them a “Trump handshake.” Be gracious in victory.

Lots of people say you’re a racist. I don’t know you and won’t take a position. But many—by no means all—of your supporters are openly racist and it seems you embraced and invigorated them to get their votes. We’re pretty white in Montana, but we’ve got a lot of Indians in the state. They were here a long time before we were, they suffered a lot of raw deals, and they deserve respect.

And lay off gay people. Many of your supporters believe they are sinful. But I say that’s between gay folks and their god. They’ve got enough on their plate and don’t need the government piling on, too.

Scott McMillion
Editor in Chief
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8 Bigger than Law
Government wrote the laws for vanquished Indian tribes. Then it wrote new laws when it broke the old ones. At Standing Rock, people are pushing back.

BY STERLING HOLYWHITEMOUNTAIN

20 Paint the Sky
Terry Lee Zee has been sending kites skyward since she was a girl. Nowadays, she’s lifting art and spirits along with them.

BY ED KEMMICK

28 The Last Pheasant of the Year
A December trip into the field, and it’s just you and the dog and all the reasons you come back to this place, every season.

BY RICK BASS

“I had never heard young people speak so eloquently and passionately, and as I listened I began to feel something beautiful and dangerous to the idea of America was happening.”

— From “Bigger than Law,” by Sterling HolyWhiteMountain, page 8
34 RURAL ROUTE
Bob Peterson has had fun managing Tongue River Reservoir State Park. But the job wasn’t for the faint of heart. Alan Kesselheim stops by for a visit.

42 SCIENCE
Montana firms play a big role in the field of phototonics. Maria Munro-Schuster peeks in with a laser focus.

50 HISTORY
J. M. Page survived the infamous Andersonville Prison and the Civil War. Later, the Montana pioneer defended the leader convicted of atrocities there. M. Mark Miller excavates the story.

56 FOOD & DRINK
Made famous by three poets, the old bar in Dixon abides, even with a “For Sale” sign out front. Chris LaTray checks in.

62 ART
Missoula actor Lily Gladstone has caught the eye of critics and audiences with her role in Certain Women. Laura Lundquist goes behind the scenes.

69 ODD CORNERS
A microscopic parasite that killed thousands of whitefish in the Yellowstone River spreads out in a warming world. Scott McMillion wades in.

70 BOOKS
Interview—Gary Ferguson tells us why western wildfires are here to stay and burn ever hotter. Kris King discusses climate change with the author of Land on Fire.

Reviews—Novels by Craig Lancaster and Allen Morris Jones display the driving power of conflict in stories, while David Quammen’s new book explores the tensions enveloping Yellowstone Park. Elise Atchison reads by the light.

76 FICTION
When to Play Dead
By Shawn Vestal
Illustrations by Dan Gravage
A young man faces the large police presence that is keeping protesters from crossing a makeshift bridge to reach an area where Dakota Access Pipeline construction is underway.
An Indian perspective on the protest at Standing Rock

BY STERLING HOLYWHITEMOUNTAIN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAT CLAYTON
In Which We Attend A Rally For Those Speaking Against The Dakota Access Pipeline, And Hear Several Girls Speak So Powerfully We Nearly Turn Our Face Away From The Beauty

On the afternoon of September 9, 2016, an injunction sought by the Standing Rock Tribe against the Dakota Access Pipeline was denied by Federal District Judge James Boasberg. Within a few hours the Obama administration, the Department of Justice, and the Army had issued a joint statement requesting that construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline just north of the Standing Rock Reservation be halted until further assessment could take place. I was at a rally in Bismarck with hundreds of others when the government’s request went public, standing in the rain on the long, manicured lawn leading up to the North Dakota capitol building, listening to several Lakota girls give speeches on a bullhorn. I had never heard young people speak so eloquently and passionately, and as I listened I began to feel something beautiful and dangerous to the idea of America was happening. Their words were so powerful, in fact, I nearly cried. Luckily for me I’m an Indian man, and we only cry in ceremony.¹

Earlier, when we had first reached the capitol lawn, a group of kids carrying signs that expressed the value of water, chanting Mni Wiconi!,² marched down a street and onto the capitol lawn. A call and response took place in which the kids called out the phrase and the people on the lawn responded with the English translation. The rain poured down, and I regretted not bringing, as many others had, a garbage bag I could use as a raincoat. A number of people, several of whom spoke in Lakota, gave their thoughts on the pipeline, the spiritual value of water, and what the larger meaning of the protest was. There was no mention of sovereignty. A hundred yards beyond us a line of North Dakota state police split the capitol lawn, separating us from the capitol building. They wore brown riot helmets to match their uniforms, and they remained, like a ghostly image frozen into a TV screen, for the entire rally. They did not speak, move, or respond, even when some of the rally-goers, stood before them, chanting Mni Wiconi! Mni Wiconi! Mni Wiconi!

¹ I use the term “Indian” because, in my experience, most reservation people still use the term, even if we also refer to ourselves by our respective tribal names, in our respective languages. I am, however, aware of the problems that go along with calling ourselves Indians, a misnomer brought here by Columbus.
² Water Is Life! in the Lakota language.
In Which We Discuss The Crimes Committed Against The Great Sioux Nation, And How The Supreme Court Gave Congress Permission To Break Treaties

The original Great Sioux Reservation was established by the Fort Laramie treaty of 1851, setting up the legal homeland for the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota peoples, who refer to themselves collectively as the Oceti Sakowin, or the Seven Councils Fire. A second Fort Laramie treaty in 1868 reduced overall reservation land, designating land that had formerly been part of that reservation, in addition to large tracts of land to the north, west and south, as unceded territory, to be used by a number of tribes in the region for subsistence purposes. The next agreement, in 1877, marked the end of legitimate relations between the Oceti Sakowin and the U.S. The result was a forced sale of the unceded territory of 1868 because gold had been found in the Black Hills by an exploratory expedition led by the infamous Custer. Initially they had refused to sell, as the Black Hills are a place held sacred by the Oceti Sakowin. Congress’ response to this refusal was to pass a bill cutting off subsistence appropriations owed to the tribe from the previous treaties, effectively telling the Oceti Sakowin they would starve if they did not sell, a situation that resulted directly from the decimation of the Plains buffalo herds, the primary food source for most Plains tribes. Following that, in 1889, Congress partitioned the Great Sioux Reservation, without negotiation or consent on the part of the tribe, into five smaller reservations, violating the 1868 treaty and illegally making 9 million acres available to non-Indians for ranching and homesteading.

These treaty violations and subsequent land thefts set the stage for the creation of Lake Oahe by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation starting in 1948. The filling of Oahe, less a lake than a massive, 231-mile-long reservoir that makes up the eastern boundaries of the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River reservations (the former eastern edge of the Great Sioux Nation), swamped over 200,000 acres of tribal land. The Dakota Access Pipeline, protested by the blood, cultural, and political descendants of those original treaty signees, is set to cross under the north end of Lake Oahe on land that, according to treaty, should never have left Indian control.

American empire, however, finds ways to justify itself to itself on paper, and much of the irreversible damage done to indigenous nations in the U.S. since the late 19th century—of which Lake Oahe is one small part—can be traced back to a 1903 U.S. Supreme Court decision, Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock. The case resulted from the 1892 attempt

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1 Sioux is a bastardized Ojibwe term, one that French trappers and traders used to refer to all three groups. But as with nearly all tribes in North America, the Euro-American term for the tribe was later adopted into legal documents, and thus most non-La/Da/Nakota North Americans refer to them as such.

2 There are numerous other cases and laws worth looking into, both because they shed further light on the ways in which the U.S. has limited tribal sovereignty and because they nakedly reveal the ways in which the U.S. federal government created, fabricated, and justified the system that allowed for the “legal” colonization of the continent. A good place to start is the Marshall Trilogy, a set of Supreme Court cases from the early 1800s involving the Cherokee; and the 1887 Dawes Act, a law that set into motion what is commonly known as the Assimilation Era.
by Congress to forcefully reduce and allot Kiowa land in what would later become Oklahoma. Despite fraudulent negotiations by the federal representatives, and terms that were not agreed upon by the necessary number of Kiowa representatives, Congress ratified the agreement. The Kiowa filed suit, and the resulting decision is one of the most egregious ever handed down in the U.S. To summarize: though evidence was overwhelmingly in favor of the Kiowa, the Court determined Congress had plenary power over Indian affairs, giving it absolute legal power over tribal nations. The immediate result was the abrogation of every treaty the U.S. had signed with those nations. The later results were policies that, among many other things: reduced reservations; allotted reservation land; determined which offenses tribal courts had jurisdiction over; made Indian people American citizens without consent; allowed Congress to terminate its legal relationship with certain tribes; forced tribes to negotiate with states regarding casino profits; and allowed for, as in the recent case of Apache land in Oak Flat in Arizona, the appropriation and sale of tribal land.

III.

In Which We Briefly Discuss What’s Going On Out There At Standing Rock, And How It’s Both About Law And Not

For those tracking the situation at Standing Rock, things can get a little muddled, in large part because it’s so difficult to find a source effectively addressing the historical context that gave rise to this moment. Initially there were vague comments from the tribal side about sovereignty and treaty land, the legitimate question of why the original pipeline route was changed from one that would have brought it near Bismarck to one just north of Standing Rock, and potential environmental issues. Of late, however, the focus has shifted.

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5 This is the case, however, with all Indian issues—accurate history is difficult to access, exactly because it has been left out of the standard educational curriculum.

6 The route was changed because of concern over the possibility of damaging municipal water supplies in the Bismarck area, one of those read-between-the-lines moments that has been largely pushed aside.
Without this level of understanding there’s no way to grasp how it came to be that the Lakota of Standing Rock are forced to block pipeline construction on their own treaty land, itself illegally subsumed by the U.S.

to the clashes between the water protectors camped at Sacred Stone and those keeping the protectors from stopping pipeline construction, namely Dakota Access’ private security forces and the militarized police from North Dakota and other states. The questions asked by U.S. media concern whether or not the protectors are acting in an illegal manner, whether the pipeline will disturb sites historically and culturally significant to the Standing Rock Tribe, whether the pipeline is a definite threat to Lake Oahe and thereby the lower Missouri and Mississippi River ecosystems, whether the permitting process was properly carried out by the Army Corps of Engineers, and what is going on with the various injunctions filed by Standing Rock and more recently the Cheyenne River Tribe. All of which are legitimate questions, but all of which are legitimate solely within the context of U.S. law.

The problem with discussing the situation merely at the level of law, or as if it were merely a regional, single-tribe issue, is that, when it comes to Indian issues, we are ultimately discussing tribal sovereignty, and the ways in which tribal nations have had their powers of sovereignty limited by erroneous Congressional actions and specious Supreme Court decisions, the resulting complications of which have stifled Indian Country economically, legally, and politically. We are ultimately discussing tribes having to exist under and within a U.S. court system that fundamentally supports, as any nation’s courts would, the continued existence of the U.S. before it supports the continued existence of tribal nations. The difficulty with this is that tribal cases, because they often involve land and resource rights that predate the existence of this country, challenge the United States both systemically and ideologically. To study the history of Indian law and Supreme Court decisions regarding Indian issues is to bear witness to the machinations of a system that must both acknowledge the political existence and rights of tribal nations while simultaneously maintaining the position of superior sovereign for the purposes of its own systemic integrity.

Without this level of understanding there’s no way to grasp how it came to be that the Lakota of Standing Rock are forced to block pipeline construction on their own treaty land, itself illegally subsumed by the U.S., because the pipeline threatens their water supply, which itself comes from federally-created Lake Oahe, an irrigation project that flooded hundreds of thousands of acres of Oceti Sakowin land without consent. It is not possible to understand why hundreds and sometimes thousands of people have been living at Sacred Stone Camp on the northwestern banks of that lake for months now, or why that camp has drawn people, both tribal and not, from all over North America, come to express their solidarity with the protest. And neither is it possible to understand why many of those people are daily willing to risk aggressions on the part of Dakota Access security and militarized police, aggressions that have included verbal attacks, physical assaults, trained attack dogs, mace, regular arrests under false accusations of inciting riots, and most recently rubber bullets, Tasers, and beatings—all on land that is, in a number of ways, Indian land.
OME 12 HOURS BEFORE THE RALLY AT THE capitol, at the end of a 700-mile journey, we drove into Sacred Stone Camp under the cover of darkness. We had taken back roads to avoid the military-style checkpoints at the southern entrance to the Standing Rock Reservation, manned as of that day by the National Guard. We did so because there were comments on various social media platforms that the Guard was not allowing people through, that people were being harassed. There was a palpable tension that ratcheted up as we drew closer to the camp, and without meaning to we became quiet, which is saying a lot when all four people in the car are Blackfeet. At our final stop before we reached the camp, at a lone gas station just off the highway, we encountered three Ford F-350s as they emerged from the darkness of the connecting county road. They circled the parking lot and sped off into the dark. Each nondescript truck had been manned by a single driver, and were it not for the fact they were driving overly fast and eerily reminiscent of fighter jets in formation, at 2:30 a.m., I would have thought little of them. Instead I asked myself, for the nth time, what the defining aspect of the relationship between the U.S. and the indigenous nations of this country was, and I settled yet again on that relationship being militaristic in nature. I asked myself why so many Americans have been, to varying degrees, afraid of Indians, and I settled yet again on the fact of our continued existence calling into question the legitimacy of this vast American project, one that has long since extended beyond the boundaries of this continent.

That evening, after the rally, and after the Obama administration had made its statement, the mood at camp was markedly different from what it had been earlier. The tension of the anticipated weekend protest action had dissipated. The change in atmosphere, though, could not keep me from thinking about what I had noticed walking around camp that morning. There were people at Sacred Stone willing to do whatever it would take to stop the pipeline. There was a presence there both of the people and larger than the people; it filled the camp, and I had never felt anything like it. There was no desperation in any of it, only clarity of purpose, a willingness to sacrifice, an immense calm and positivity running through everyone.

IV.

In Which We Note The Beauty Of Burgeoning Global Indigeneity, Why Americans Have Always Been Just A Little Bit Afraid Of Indians, And The Meaning Of Sacred Stone Camp
Protesters in a canoe float alongside armed officers in a motor boat.
I asked myself where else in the U.S. one could go to find this kind of relationship to land and water, and I believe the answer is nowhere other than somewhere else in Indian Country.

The next night in camp, our last, the atmosphere approached celebratory. Like a powwow without the dance arbor, the Zipper, or the Chinese-food vendors, but with the familiar tipis, horse riders, and that ever-present pair of teenage girls walking around camp in the early evening, talking quietly, listening to Kanye on a smartphone, hoping to cross paths with that cute guy and his friend. The differences, those that reminded me where I was, were the entrance protocols, songs, and talks given by indigenous people from all over the globe; the makeshift medical tent run by ragged, non-Indian volunteers; the half-whispered plans to travel to protest sites and the necessary caution that surrounded those plans. What brought all of these disparate elements together was the laughter I heard everywhere in camp, because no one is more ready to enjoy themselves in the middle of hell than Indian people.

What I think about most often, though, since returning from Sacred Stone, is the entrance to the camp, lined with hundreds of flags, each representing a tribal nation supporting the protest at Sacred Stone. If there was talk of sovereignty anywhere in camp, it was limited to personal conversations I was not privy to. And, even if there were such talks, chances are it would not be at the level of discourse Indian people so desperately need. It’s not enough to utter sovereignty; the word must be underpinned by a kind of legal and historical knowledge that, until recently, was unavailable to any but the most dedicated researchers, the rarest of specialists. But sovereignty, or the desire for it, also requires resistance at both the micro and macro levels. Sometimes this means refusing to allow a degrading remark to pass; sometimes this means standing in the way of a pipeline and claiming a treaty the U.S. has, for all intents and purposes, not legitimately acknowledged in over 140 years. I have asked myself, given the collective political condition of the tribes, what the meaning of those flags might be, which is to say, the larger meaning of the situation at Standing Rock. Are the flags more than decoration? Is the situation more than a protest? To grow up an Indian in Indian Country is to know you are sovereign, but to have no idea how that might work.

I believe there are two Sacred Stones. There is the physical, the camp itself: the tipis and tents, the powwow chairs, the campfires, the cars and trucks parked everywhere askew, the long, flag-lined drive, the Indians and the handful of non-Indians performing that delicate balancing act of getting along without pretending we are the same. There is Lake Oahe, whose calm surface, on a clear day, lights like a flaming mirror. There is the drill pad just to the north, on Oahe’s western shore, where Dakota Access intends to run the pipeline under the lake. There are the prayers and songs, which, as with any ceremony, may stop, but only temporarily. These are the immediate elements that make up the awful beauty of this indigenous protest; beautiful because there is no togetherness like that of Indianness, awful because the reason we’ve gathered is a reminder of why we call ourselves Indians in the first place.

The second camp is more difficult to grasp or describe. This camp is the idea and feeling of Sacred Stone, which have already become separate from the actual camp, from the actual protest sites. We entered this second camp, each one of us, all of America, the moment the pipeline was first imagined, the moment the first water protectors made the decision to stop the pipeline, the moment the first colonists landed on the eastern shores of this continent and were met there by
indigenous people. To enter into this second camp is to enter the questions that have haunted Indian Country and America for centuries, questions about land, water, history, ownership, honor and justice. The question of whether tribal nations can truly defend what is theirs when the laws they must live under are the laws of empire. The question of whether America is capable of being the kind of nation it claims to be, but never was. This second Sacred Stone has already become the new symbol of hope and heartbreak for American Indian people, the symbol into which all these separate, lesser questions are poured, where they become one: the question of tribal sovereignty.

Neither the physical camp nor the idea of the camp can answer this question; they are simply the latest catalyst and vessel for Indian Country, the way we will carry this issue forward in the years to come until the next significant indigenous protest arises and replaces it. How Indian people respond in the interim will not change or influence laws or court decisions directly, but our individual and collective responses will affect the conversation that surrounds the issue of tribal governance. Perhaps more importantly this conversation, according to our ignorance or lack thereof, according to our willingness to act or merely sit idly by, will help determine the shape of the idea of tribal nations in America. That idea will speak both to how we think about ourselves now and to our capacity to imagine the future we want. The distance between the current moment and that idea will tell us, tribal and American citizens alike, what work there is to be done.
Solar Collector by Shirl Ireland
oil on linen 12" x 12"

Big Horn Skull by Shirl Ireland
graphite on paper 22" x 28"

Creek Crossing by John Stacy
(detail) bronze 28" x 8" x 10"
Paint the Sky
A Billings couple puts art aloft, and in the process lifts spirits.

For part of Terry Zee Lee’s childhood, her family lived near the Pacific Ocean in Oregon. She and her three sisters and her brother would often spend the whole day playing on the beach. Their mother, who wanted to keep an eye on them but had things to do, would tie a kite string to each child’s wrist, so that they were all tethered to kites soaring above the beach.
Terry Zee Lee says there’s nothing quite like seeing a painting on a kite. “If you think about it,” she says, “the sky is the perfect frame.”

“Little things happen all the time with these kites, and keep me going back. We like to say that kites are only superficially trivial.”
Their mother could do her work around the house while periodically looking out the window and counting kites. You might say that Lee has been attached to kites ever since.

Another formative experience in her youth was her interaction with a group of Native American women. She and her siblings spent a month every summer at their grandparents’ house in Red Mountain, Colorado, and Lee would see “these marvelous, beautiful Southern Ute women” sitting in clusters on downtown benches. Soon she got to know them, and she would sit with them all day long, mesmerized by their conversations in a language she didn’t understand.

Her mother, a teacher, reinforced her admiration for Native American people and culture. “Mom taught us, if there was any royalty in America, it was the native tribes,” she said.

Many decades later, in ways that would have been hard to imagine way back when, Lee would combine her two passions, creating exhibitions and staging spectacles involving kites bearing beautiful, elaborate works of Native American art. Most notably, she has gone to buffalo jumps in Montana, Wyoming and Alberta, Canada, for the past four summers, flying kites bearing Native American images over cliffs that once drew bison to their deaths.

One of the artists commissioned to create art for the buffalo jump project, Angela Babby, said it was “amazing … miraculous,” to see her painting Resurrection sailing high above a buffalo jump. And holding onto her creation in flight was another revelation.

“It’s really hard to fly,” she said. “It’s like being with a horse.”

This fall, Babby and two other Native American artists accompanied Lee and her husband, kite
maker Drake Smith, to the International Dieppe Kite Festival in Normandy, France, one of the biggest kiting events in the world.

Almost everywhere she flies her kites, Lee also works as an educator, going into classrooms to teach children the basics of science, engineering and math through the making and flying of kites. Those aren’t the only lessons that kiting has to teach, though.

Every summer for many years, Bill Snell has brought young Indians from all over North America to a “Two Worlds Cultural Immersion Camp” at Fort Smith on the Crow Indian Reservation. Snell, director of the Montana-Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council and president of the Pretty Shield Foundation, said the camp uses Native American cultural traditions and principles to help troubled young people find their way in the world. These are kids who have dealt with drug and alcohol
addictions, who have been physically, mentally and sexually abused.

The young people are taught principles that will help them have better lives, and the lessons are driven home through “experiential exercises” involving horses, plants and Native American battle sites—and, for some years past, creating and flying kites with Terry Zee Lee.

Lee remembers one young man in particular, an Ojibwe from Manitoba who was angry at the world, angry at himself, locked in a shell that seemed impossible to penetrate. But Lee kept trying, and at last the young man started working on a drawing that would be made into a kite. The drawing consisted of a hand, giving the finger. Lee, unflustered, patiently worked with him, asking whether his anger extended to the natural world, too, or just to other people and himself.

He acknowledged that he felt at peace when he was alone with nature. Lee suggested he add another raised finger to his drawing, changing it from a contemptuous putdown to a peace sign. He not only did that; he surrounded the peace sign with rainbows and soon he was flying it in the sky.

Snell told Lee that the boy came back the next summer, this time as a camp counselor. The kites, Snell said, have been “really amazing. When they fly them, that’s you soaring above your troubles and being a better person.”

Lee, for her part, said, “Little things happen all the time with these kites, and keep me going back. We like to say that kites are only superficially trivial.”

Lee got involved with kites as an adult in the mid-1990s. The Billings-Logan International Airport had built a new terminal and Lee, long involved in tourism and promotion, told her friend, airport director Bruce Putnam, that she wanted to mount some kind of exhibit that would show off the new terminal—“make the airport really pop,” in her words.

The idea she finally hit on was kites. Their suggestion of flight, the opportunity to introduce so many colors and to fill a very large space—it all just seemed to make sense. She decided the theme of the exhibit would be the new millennium, and after doing some research she approached 18 of the best kite makers in the world and asked them to be part of the project.

It might seem like an audacious way to get the job done, but Lee has never been shy, and she has never been one for half measures. She loved her parents, she said, but she grew up in an era when it was simply a given that the aspirations of her one brother would be more important to the family than those of herself and her three sisters.

As a result, she said, “I’ve spent most of my life doing unusual things that men told me I couldn’t do.”
Above, painted kites greeted those who came to the grand opening of John H. Dover Memorial Park in Billings.

As her husband, Drake Smith, put it, “Terry will cold-call anyone on the planet.” That first kite exhibit went up in 1999, and while she was still working on it, Lee attended the American Kite Flyers Convention in 1998, where she suggested having Billings host the convention in 2001. It was an amazing thing to “stumble into the middle of that group,” made up of artists, engineers and scientists, all of them creative and many of them quite eccentric, Lee said.

The 2001 convention was held in Billings, just three weeks after the terror attacks of September 11. That cut attendance considerably, but the convention was a success—and Lee managed to sell all 18 of the millennium exhibit kites, recouping the $18,000 she had spent out of her own pocket.

In the process, she also met Smith, a kite maker who was then still working for the CIA and living near Washington, D.C. In what capacity? He answered, cryptically enough, as “an engineer, or intelligence officer, or project engineer, whatever you want to call it.” Like Lee, he started flying kites on a beach, though he was an adult at the time. His sister-in-law lived in Colorado and came out to the East Coast every few years for a “beach fix.” Since he was spending so much time there, a friend bought him a kite.

The engineer in him was soon fascinated, and he got hooked on buying and repairing kites and then joined the Virginia Kite Society. “It was like suddenly discovering people from my planet,” he says.
Five years after Smith and Lee met, by which time they had both gone through divorces, they were married in 2006. When Smith retired from the CIA he moved to Billings, where their lives have revolved around kites ever since.

Lee would go on to mount other kite exhibits at the Billings airport, including a tribute to Lewis and Clark during the 2004–06 bicentennial of their expedition. Thirty American kite makers took part in the exhibition, 10 creating kites about the Corps of Discovery itself, 10 about the Native Americans encountered by Lewis and Clark, and 10 about the flora, fauna and natural wonders they recorded.

That exhibit would later travel to Great Falls, to Portland, Oregon, to Louisville, Kentucky, and to Omaha, Nebraska. Lee says it was probably the most significant American kite exhibit ever assembled.

Lee started the Flying Buffalo Project in 2013, working with Manuela Well-Off-Man, associate curator of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, to find 20 Native American artists who would create paintings on rip-stop nylon that Smith would then make into kites.

“Terry’s the visionary and I’m the mechanic,” Smith said.

The kites were first flown that summer at Madison Buffalo Jump State Park near Three Forks, and then at First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park near Great Falls, Vore Buffalo Jump near Beulah, Wyoming, and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, a World Heritage Site in Alberta, Canada. They have gone back to all four sites every summer since.

One of the Indian artists, Alaina Buffalo Spirit, hasn’t been to a buffalo jump event yet, but she did get to see her artwork flying this summer at the grand opening of John H. Dover Memorial Park, a stunning mix of Yellowstone River bottomland and high sandstone bluffs a little northeast of Billings.

And this fall, Buffalo Spirit was one of the artists who attended the kite festival in France. The theme of this year’s festival was indigenous culture, and Buffalo Spirit met native people from New Zealand, Australia, Thailand and Bali, among other countries.

Like Lee, she wants to get children involved in making kites.

“It opened my eyes to the possibilities of teaching our native children to make different designs, to inspire them to get into it as much as the international community,” Buffalo Spirit said.

Angela Babby, who also went to France, described the experience as “a hopeful and life-altering experience.” She said it was magical to see her painting against a backdrop of sky, brought to life by the wind and viewed by people from all over the world.

“It was a visual expression that we each are part of the cosmos and we each have our place in it,” she said.
the last pheasant of the year

BY RICK BASS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONY BYNUM
How can you love it so much, and yet more, then, with each passing month, until what was merely magnificent and joyful in October has by December become something even more than that? There is a fullness as well as a desperation to your days, in December, as you witness the season winding down. All autumn, your brain has become increasingly wired to the pleasure of being afield, and of communicating with your dog—more and more with the dog, and ever less with the rest of the world, until you are much more like the dog, at the end of the season, than you were before. Eat, sleep, hunt. The dog’s always been wired this way, but by December, you’ve come a little closer to catching up with the dog’s brain, the dog’s heart. You have become the dog, in so many respects; the dog now owns you. She sends you brainwaves in the night, Go hunting, go hunting tomorrow, and in the field, you are able to understand her so much more clearly than at the beginning of the season. Finally, after many miles, she just about has you trained up; and you love it.
But in December, you don’t want to think about next year, even though it’s now so present in your mind. It’s ending, you think. I love it more than ever, and it’s ending.

And the food! You’ve even become accustomed to the horridness of the prairie food: little better than gas station fare—a dry burger, stale buns, speckled old iceberg lettuce—a cold, day-old corn dog, withered, snatched from the convenience store; a bag of chips, a candy bar shoved quickly into your maw for more fuel, not even bothering to take your gloves off, while walking, gun tucked into the crook of an aching arm, leaning into the wind, eating that candy bar as if shoveling dirty coal into the boiler of a ceaseless engine in a faltering, listing ship, a barge, plowing ahead through the crust of wind-scoured snow, punch-walking, pushing on, one more bird, you want just one more bird, they’ve got to be out here somewhere.

And so you become used to even the atrocity of the food, to the point where it becomes almost comfortable—the way your dog will wolf down any old thing, in hunting season, hoovering it down as if it’s the best thing in the world. In polite company you would humiliate yourself with the things you inhale. A root beer, a glowing green or purple sports drink, luminous as cobalt, a bag of peanuts, an ice cream sandwich, no danger of it ever melting, even if it stays in your pocket all day. That wind.

For a health kick, a bag of popcorn, a banana. Get back out in the field. Get back out in the field with your dog. It’s far quicker and easier to be a scavenger than either a chef or gourmet, and in December, with the season winding down, time is the great richness, the great meal. The last dinner.

This trip is like almost any other December trip, so different from earlier in the season as to make it seem you are hunting a different species, and in a different country. The birds are bigger, their tails so much longer, and they are so much wilder, so much smarter. They flush sometimes half a mile away from your car, a speck launching itself across the horizon before you have even loaded your gun and turned the dog out. And by December, they know even better than you do the precise boundaries of safety and
no-hunting zones, to the point where they will bask in vast numbers in the front yards of their protectors, the farmers who have not granted permission to hunt. The pheasants’ benefactors, the pheasants’ friends. And you can’t be cross with these folks, nor complain, for it is their protectorate that helps yield the core for next year.

But in December, you don’t want to think about next year, even though it’s now so present in your mind. It’s ending, you think. I love it more than ever, and it’s ending.

Sometimes, in December, you will find the roosters in places where you would never find them at any other time of year. All they care for in December is to be in places where no human has or ever will walk, so that you might find one living in the front seat of an abandoned 1939 rust- and wind-gutted Ford, sunk to its axles in the rich soil as the earth reclaims it; or in the strange postage stamp of stone pile and fallow, coils of twisted barbed wire causing the tractor to avoid that one small spot, with no other cover for a quarter mile in any direction. Or even out in the shorn yellow stubble, lying flatter than flat, thinking, knowing, the hunter will never come out here in the scorched earth barrens—and you, walking with your gun empty, talking to a friend or just thinking daydream thoughts, will flush one of these desperadoes, usually a big bird, and you’ll nearly drop your gun, you’re so surprised, even though your dog had been starting to get birdy and was trying to tell you to wake up, pay attention, don’t give up, in December they could be almost anywhere. Pheasants hanging upside down, perhaps, inside old barns, like bats in a colony. Pheasants in trees, like Christmas partridges, clutching the branches awkwardly with their horned feet.

I'd like to tell you that last year’s last day was perfect. That I found more birds everywhere, and that I connected. But that was not how it went. I spent the day walking, following the dog, pushing, but found nothing: not a shot fired, not a rooster sighted.

The day passed so quickly, as they do in northern Montana, this close to the solstice. Around the middle of the afternoon, I decided to travel north, to put myself closer, at the end of the day, to home, which still lay many hours away, and with the wind howling, 50, 60, 65 miles an hour. I was in that zone, deeper than ever, of wanting: just one more, just for the dog. So keenly aware, as the last day darkened that this was it, the long winter’s sleep, the long year’s sleep, lay now only hours ahead. The little prairie towns lie forgotten—never known,
really—along the snowy Front, one every 20 or so miles, an expression of topography. The closest people can stand to live together in this country, without running out of resources or going to war against one another.

And—isn't this the way of the world?—as I'm driving north, feeling a little blue about having only one more run, I have even that taken away from me, in the form of a sputtering, stalling vehicle. As I'm gliding to a stop, I point the car west, so that I may at least look at the mountains as darkness descends.

I could have kept an eye on the tank. I'd like another run, of course—oh, it hurts, knowing the last has already come and gone—how many more long months until the next bird gets up, cackling, just beyond the end of the barrel? But I've been here before. Things end. Each year—if you are lucky—you will find yourself finally at the end, looking out at the last of the last. Maybe walking, piercing the gloom with your dog—maybe
sitting with your dog, plucking the feathers from the last rooster—or maybe just sitting in the car, waiting on AAA—a miracle, really, that there’s dim, sporadic, wind-wavering cell coverage and I don’t have to hitchhike in the below-zero windchill.

The wind gusts, shaking the little car. Help will be coming from an hour away. What’s an hour? I sit in the shuddering, rocking car as if still traveling on into time, and watch the deep purple climb down out of the mountains and over the prairie toward me, toward me quickly, as if watching the screen of a drive-in movie theater. The movie is my life, my dog’s life, with nothing ever changing, there will always be one more until one day, finally—perhaps suddenly, perhaps not—there is none.

I drink in the last of the blue light hungrily, and begin the long wait, the long sleep, until next year.
Bob Peterson’s tenure managing Tongue River Reservoir State Park has been fun—and not for the faint of heart

The first phase of Bob Peterson’s job interview for head honcho at Tongue River Reservoir State Park took place over Memorial Day in 2000. Two parks officials who were courting Peterson for the job decided to take him down for an informal tour. When they arrived at the unassuming body of water in middle-of-nowhere Montana, they found a rampaging party of several hundred intoxicated people, uncontrolled bonfires, kegs of beer, drugs and loud music.

Peterson had been a game warden for almost three decades. He was used to tense situations. He had backup. They figured, between the three of them and some official-looking badges, that they could reclaim a semblance of order. They waded in to the melee.

“We ended up having to punch our way out of there to escape,” remembers Peterson. “There was no way we were going to control that scene. We got out of there, but not exactly unscathed.”

By Alan Kesselheim

Photography by Thomas Lee
Bob Peterson has been managing the Tongue River Reservoir State Park and the Rosebud Battlefield State Park for more than a decade. Though remotely located, Tongue River attracts thousands of campers on summer weekends.
After that, his guides assumed Peterson’s interest in the job might have taken a terminal hit.

“Actually, I was into the challenge,” Peterson says with a laugh.

In short order, perhaps before he changed his mind, Peterson was hired as park manager for both Tongue River and nearby Rosebud Battlefield state parks, part of a state system supporting 55 parks that serve 2.3 million visitors a year. Sixteen years later Peterson is still at it, though he plans to retire at the end of this year.

Peterson’s wife, Lynn, remembers that first time they drove down to the park. “I thought we’d come to the end of the world,” she says.

Born in Great Falls, raised in Wyoming, Peterson had been a Wyoming game warden for 27 years before returning to Montana to take the parks position. At first the job was part time, and the workforce consisted of Peterson, a ranger and a caretaker. Peterson has a square, compact build, a thatch of sandy, graying hair. His hands are busy. He seems uncomfortable in an office chair, where, these days, he spends much of the winter.

“When I started it was watercraft enforcement and getting a handle on basic services for the first couple of years,” Peterson says. “And all that silliness you get with alcohol.”

Peterson’s experience as a warden stood him in good stead. Warnings, citations and the occasional use of Hardin jail cells started to have an effect. Still, law enforcement can get dicey. The closest backup with any real authority is more than 90 minutes away. It was up to Peterson to maintain order and handle emergencies without firearms or reinforcements.
“It’s a good thing I have a type double-A personality,” Peterson says. “When it comes to law enforcement, what that means is that I might have to control a large drunken individual who has been trying to rape young girls at 2 a.m. until the sheriff gets here. It gets interesting.”

Tongue River Reservoir, 12 miles long, tickling the border between Montana and Wyoming outside of Decker, covers nearly 80,000 acre-feet of warm-water fishery: pike, bass, crappie, perch, walleye. Fishing remains the park's biggest draw. The reservoir has provided several state fishing records, including a 37.5-pound northern pike and a black crappie that weighed in at better than 3 lbs. While fishing has always been outstanding, that was pretty much all the reservoir had going for it before Peterson arrived. The park had sketchy garbage collection, a couple of ramshackle outhouses, and people camped wherever they liked along two-track roads spidering across the 640-acre park.

“Camping back then was ‘circle up the wagons’ style, pretty much anything goes,” Peterson says. “Our visitation was 50/50 Montana and Wyoming residents. People came from Billings and Miles City, Sheridan and Gillette. My first year we had 35,000 visitors.”

In a way, Tongue River State Park is a microcosm of western frontier history, from vigilante chaos to settled order, on fast-forward. Within a decade Peterson and his staff transformed the park.

“It took a couple of years to start turning things around,” remembers Peterson. “Frankly, this place was nuked when I got here. The ground was totally denuded. Nothing was maintained.” Slowly the word got out that the park was getting more organized, and that it was becoming more of a family destination than a weekend rager with fish thrown in.

Within five years, annual visitation peaked above 100,000. The manager job became full time. Peterson added staff, upgraded facilities, organized the camping. Since then it has been a steady progression of improvements, programs, and development. At this point the park essentially provides the services, and supports a community, on a par with many small towns.

“We’ve stabilized visitation
somewhere around 65,000 to 75,000 per year,” Peterson says. “I have a staff of six. We maintain 22 bathrooms, haul 40 tons of garbage every year, mow 200 acres of grass, provide water, sanitation services, a fish cleaning station that goes day and night during the summer, a system of roads, law enforcement.”

In short, Peterson and his staff run a town the size of Red Lodge or Libby that turns over its population every week. Open year-round, the park also supports a thriving ice-fishing crowd through the winter months.

“On any given winter weekend we could have a bigger population out on the ice than live in Decker,” says Jordan Straley, park game warden.

Like any community, Tongue River State Park has to cope with its mix of location, climate, political entities, surrounding industry and logistical challenges.

Look up, and west, to where the Bighorn Mountains shoulder against the horizon. The Tongue River snakes its path out of the high country, fed by mountain snows and springs, some 265 miles to the confluence with the Yellowstone River near Miles City. The reservoir backs up into draws and tributaries, laps against red sandstone cliffs, stands out like an odd-shaped pendant on a necklace in the sweep of prairie grasslands.

Local climate tends to be brutally hot in the summer and bitterly cold in the winter.

“We had over 100 degrees for three weeks straight this summer, and only three rain storms all season,” Peterson says. “In the winter we’re a cold micro-climate. We can be 10 degrees colder than Decker. Never mind the winds.”

Indian lands of Northern Cheyenne and Crow tribes start a few miles north of the park. The Wyoming border crosses just to the south. The reservoir itself fluctuates with snowmelt, drought, flood, and the demands of the downstream Tongue and Yellowstone Irrigation District. Coal operations near Decker dominate the local economy (and the near horizon), and the recent boom in coalbed methane has impacted the park in unexpected ways.

“It isn’t unusual to shake up a jug of well water and set it on fire with a match,” reports Peterson. “I’ve already had two water wells turn into gas-producing wells.”
Between local geology, methane drilling and use of the area water supply by the mining industry, providing potable water has become one of the most challenging issues at the park. In the future, availability of good water may impose a limit on usage.

“Since 2000 we’ve put about $8 million into improvements,” Peterson reports. “We’ve paved the roads, built campsite loops, put in buildings for staff, drilled wells, hooked up electricity, built the maintenance and repair shop, a fish-cleaning station, the boat ramps and docks. My challenge, always, is to meet the demands of visitation and stay within my budget.”

“What I didn’t expect, and what I wasn’t trained for, was to be a hotel manager,” grumbles Peterson, who spends more time than he’d like logging in reservations and answering the phone.

With some pride, Peterson claims that Tongue River is one of only two parks in the 55-unit Montana system that pays its way with fees. The other one is Lewis and Clark Caverns.

Under Peterson’s watch, what was a denuded landscape with a helter-skelter system of unmaintained roads, inundated by weekend madness with crowds in the thousands, has been utterly transformed. Seven campground areas now provide 81 electrical hookups, clean bathrooms, tables and fire rings, running water. More primitive tent-camping is also available, along with a small campground below the dam, away from the summer frenzy. Trees line the shoreline and manicured grass has replaced bare dirt. State-of-the-art boat ramps and a full-service marina and store support thousands of anglers.

“The campground below the dam is my favorite,” Peterson admits. “It’s quiet down there. The river runs past. I like to spend time there.”

Like a friendly mayor, Peterson devotes a good deal of his time during the busy season wandering around and visiting. “I want to know what’s on people’s minds, why they’re here, how they heard about us, what they like and

Groundskeeper Sonny Halsing was hard at work repainting outhouse floors during the lull after Labor Day.
what they think needs improving. Sometimes they come up with really good ideas."

That sociability has its rewards. Many people return year after year, bringing out-of-town guests, and the park has benefitted from donations like the campground playground made possible by a $50,000 donation from the Billings chapter of Walleye Unlimited.

Unlike most small towns, the population changes every summer week. Between campers and day visits, on average, something like 3,000 people leave, and 3,000 more show up every weekend during the summer season. Montanans are the biggest users of the park, followed by Wyoming residents, but more and more visitors come from out of state, as well as from Canada and other countries. In addition to fishing, people jet ski, water ski, go tubing, kayak and canoe.

Every campsite loop fills with rigs worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. "You see trailers with 55-inch flat-screen televisions that people sit outside and watch movies on," Peterson says. "Microwaves, showers, deluxe living rooms, and they're pulling trailers with expensive boats and jet skis." People expect sanitation services, potable water, electricity, garbage pickup, mowed lawns, and easy access.

Nothing comes easy, either. Sheridan, Wyoming is 30 miles away. Billings is a two-hour drive. Going to town to get new tires can consume half a day. Medical help is distant. Any mechanical repair that can't be done on-site is doubly expensive because it requires a service call. Peterson leans heavily on his staff to manage those challenges and be self-sufficient.

"After dealing with the public, hiring good staff is my biggest priority," says Peterson.

John "Sonny" Helsing is central to that goal of self-sufficiency. He is the park groundskeeper and maintenance man with a reputation for fixing the impossible. "He's one of those guys who can fix anything with next-to-nothing," marvels Peterson. "It's amazing."

"He's the best boss I've had in 45 years," says Halsing in return. "Course, I was self-employed for most of my life!"

Jordan Straley is the park game warden, and has represented the very long arm of the law at Tongue River for the past five years. Most of his day is spent juggling the routine details of licenses, fish limits and safety violations, maintaining order out of the potential chaos of boats and people having fun, drinking, ramming around at high speeds and trying to stay out of each other's way. The park isn't immune from its fair share of social ills, either, including disorderly conduct, outbreaks of domestic violence and neighborhood disputes. In addition to law enforcement, Straley is a certified Wilderness First Responder.

"That comes in really handy when some guy runs his wife over backing up the boat trailer and the ambulance is two hours away," Peterson says. "True story."

Every summer Peterson hires a handful of seasonal employees who share housing on park grounds, who are willing to accept low hourly wages and live 30 miles from the nearest town, who handle the daily grunt work and are the park ambassadors. They run the gamut from retirees and school teachers to college kids.

"You see people giving those guys hugs when they leave," says Peterson. "I look for hires with confidence, intelligence, humor. People who don't need supervising and who can communicate."

A large part of what keeps staff content is the atmosphere Peterson and his wife have created. Lynn Peterson welcomes people into their home, where she posts humorous and often off-color sayings on the cupboards. She organizes family campground activities, art-in-the-park sessions for wives and kids on summer weekends. Every couple of weeks the Petersons host summer staff for a fish fry, or birthday parties, or going-away parties. In the winter they go "rock-bowling" and ice-skating on the lake.

Peterson points to a large framed picture in the corner of his living room. It is a battle scene from Custer's Last Stand. Fallen cavalry, dead horses, discarded weapons litter the ground around Custer, who is defiantly raising a sabre over his head. The plaque on the bottom of the picture frame reads, "Pete's Memorial Day Stand."

"We've had a lot of fun here, raising our kids, meeting people," Lynn says. "We're going to miss this."
Zack Cole, director of scientific materials at FLIR Systems Inc., in Bozeman, peers through a garnet crystal used to build high-power laser systems for jobs like cutting and welding sheet metal for automotive and heavy-equipment manufacturing.
A Certain Quality of Light

Montana firms play a big role in world-class phototonics

BY MARIA MUNRO-SCHUSTER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS LEE

T he year was 1960 and Ralph Hutcheson, a native of Havre, Montana, and a recent MSU graduate, was in the midst of another typical workday at the Union Carbide crystal production facility in Indianapolis, Indiana. A slip of paper, requesting a synthetic ruby of unique size and quality from a Dr. Theodore Maiman, found its way to his desk.

Maiman’s request likely wouldn’t be met—the purity of a chemically grown crystal became more difficult to maintain as its size increased. Despite his uncertainties, Hutcheson set to work carefully seeding and pulling a ruby crystal from a pool of molten chemicals. After several attempts, Hutcheson contacted Maiman at Hughes Aircraft Company in Malibu, California, and let him know that his exact specifications couldn’t be met, but that he’d send something.

On May 16th, 1960, unbeknownst to his colleagues for fear of being mocked, Maiman dropped the pink ruby—about the size of an
At FLIR Systems Inc., laser light travels into a crystal under the watch of Zack Cole, director of scientific materials. Crystals are used to filter and focus light into lasers.
earplug—into a simple aluminum cavity no bigger than a model car, and pushed a button. Something happened that many well-known scholars believed to be impossible. Something that, at first, couldn’t be seen—a narrow spectrum of light. Maiman had just crossed the finish line in a global scientific sprint for the world’s first laser.

A Los Angeles Times headline proclaimed, “New Death Ray Development: Outrivals Science Fiction,” but it was the publication in the prestigious journal Nature that solidified the laser’s monumental place in history. The Nobel Prize-winning physicist and creator of laser theory, Charles H. Townes, declared that Maiman’s brief publication “was probably more important per word than any of the papers published by Nature over the past century.”

Hutcheson’s supporting role in the world of manipulating light, formally known as photonics or optics, didn’t stop at assisting Maiman. Seeking a quality of life Hutcheson remembered from the landscape of his youth, in 1989 he returned to Montana to lay groundwork for what would become one of the country’s highest per-capita concentration of photonics companies: Bozeman, Montana.

Today, more than 30 photonics companies dot the Gallatin Valley, employing over 500 people. To look at the valley’s humming photonics community is to encounter the elegant efficiency and pragmatism of a clock’s face and then to open the back and see the wheels turning and clicking.

Conveyor belt rushes a stream of mangled objects fresh from the recycling truck beneath the eyes of a hyperspectral imager—essentially, a camera that can distinguish a piece of Number 5 plastic from a Number 7, due to the unique spectrum of light that every known material produces. While a normal camera captures red, green and blue light, a hyperspectral camera captures hundreds of colors, even ones that people can’t see. Bozeman-based Resonon designs these cameras, used worldwide for everything from precision agriculture to sorting nuts and pills. The company is set to double its sales this spring. And it’s just one of many such firms in the Gallatin Valley.

Despite the overall success in the Bozeman photonics industry, most people don’t know much about it. What is photonics? Are lasers the same as light sabers? How could light be the solution to so many problems?

Photonics involves more than laser technologies, but refining laser light to be used in larger systems is something the locals do well, and the science is at the heart of many photonics technologies.

Laser light, an acronym for the cumbersome Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation, is different from natural light because it is a single color. While light from the sun or a light bulb contains many colors of the spectrum, laser light consists of only one wavelength of light. When the same color of light is traveling at the same phase and is traveling in one direction, rather than spreading out like light from the sun,
“That’s what researchers do, we solve problems. We create new knowledge.”

the result is an intense light with the power to accomplish very specific tasks.

The process of making laser light begins when light from a bright but broad spectrum-light, like a flash-lamp, is pulsed into a chamber toward atoms. The chamber might contain a crystal like Maiman’s, or a gas or a liquid. As soon as the energy from the flash-lamp contacts the atoms inside the medium, some atoms absorb new energy and become excited. When this happens, each atom attempts to re-stabilize itself by giving off extra energy in the same form it was received: that of a photon—a flash of light.

The secret to a laser is the mirrors positioned at both ends of the chamber. As the photons bounce off the mirrors in a continuous game of ping-pong, they further stimulate other photons, building up energy of the same wavelength and frequency of light—countless photons flashing one very specific color. This light beam exits the chamber through a partially reflecting mirror. In this moment, a scientist will observe the laser beam crossing the airspace of the lab. This is where the red light of the bar scanner at the grocery store reaches your package of gum. Or where the LASIK eye surgery excimer laser meets the stroma layer in your cornea.

For every finely tuned watch, there is a watchmaker who knows each of its parts and ensures with obsessive precision that they work together. Dr. Joe Shaw’s office, on the fifth floor of Cobleigh Hall at Montana State University, has a small window looking over the mountains at his back and is serendipitously a stone’s throw from where he was conceived. His family has been in the area since 1863. He’s been at MSU for nearly 16 years.

Curiosity about the natural world was passed down from Shaw’s father, a physics professor who pulled him out of bed late at night to track fluorescing scorpions in the Arizona desert with ultraviolet lights. And who shut off the furnace unannounced in Alaska’s mid-winter to measure the gravitational constant of a grapefruit.

Shaw is a bit of a singularity in the world of head-down technical academia; he communicates eloquently. As a result, one of the many roles he performs is that of a bridge between worlds: one comprising eager students, another the photonics industry, and the third in the political realm. He’s watched the valley’s optics technologies evolve from basic laser systems to growing better crystals for lasers to improving the fundamental elements that surround lasers to advanced technologies that include laser imaging systems.

Officially, Shaw has been the director of the Optical Technology Center since 2003. He speaks of the optical pioneers: John Carlsten, Rufus Cone, Roger Robichaud and Larry Johnson, who, like Hutcheson, came to the area before tech companies existed because they wanted a better quality of life—even at the risk of missing out on cutting-edge science. At heart, he is a photographer and promoter of appreciating optical effects in nature.

“What universities do best is curiosity-driven science, and if some of that can be sparked by real problems in industry, then that is all the better,” Shaw says. Student researchers and the industry need each other, and it is a philosophy Shaw infuses in his students. “Industry matters,” he says. “Previously, students were learning about optics here, and then they were having to leave the state.”

Paul Nugent, a current doctoral student and a native of Fairfield, Montana, has chosen to stay. He stands before a luminous expanse of brittle golden barley, with grainy purple clouds forming a dramatic backdrop. The sight cues a familiar tension. With the crop mature, and the storm lingering on
the horizon, farmers have a tight deadline.

As a young man, he harvested these fields with his father, and he remembers his duties quite well, including noticing weeds so they could be sprayed later. Sometimes, his father had him raise the header of his combine a few inches around the weeds, making them easier to see and giving the field the appearance of a bad haircut.

But today, Nugent is here as a scientist, hungry to meet the needs of a community he loves—a practitioner of Shaw’s “industry matters.” When the opportunity arose as a senior at MSU to use spectral imaging systems to solve problems, Nugent had one in mind: farmers spend millions spraying herbicides each year, and some weeds have become resistant to the chemicals. Small cameras with spectral filters mounted high in the window of a grain combine can detect changes in light from photosynthesizing weeds. Processed images clearly show weed patches in fiery yellow and red. Farmers can then avoid blanket-spraying a crop before the next seeding.

Bringing new technology to the fields of his upbringing, he treads lightly. The farming community has responded well to the agricultural monitoring system, Nugent says, but he keeps in mind the cost and ease of use for farmers. He has plans for a start-up company—a marriage of old memories and new ideas.

For ambitious up-and-coming scientists like Nugent, storm clouds are always adding tension to the air. His mentor Shaw knows that monumental problems and their brilliant solutions don’t find each other on their own. The real challenge is less of a science. “The constant battle is trying to communicate with people who might care. You have to keep beating the streets and always be talking about it.”

Shaw is no stranger to the Montana State Legislature, but he has found that, as an individual speaking for the university, his message lacks the impartiality that
is needed when explaining, for example, how a lidar system could help save the cutthroat trout of Yellowstone Lake—a technology Shaw feels passionate about, but one for which funding is difficult to maintain.

This is where Shaw's and the university's strong bond with the photonics industry has borne fruit. “[The Photonics Industry Alliance] went to Helena and said, we're the industry and we think that the university is our most beneficial ally and we think you need to step up and support them better,” Shaw explains.

In 2015, for the first time, the state replied to the calls of Shaw, the Photonics Industry Alliance, and others for funding that would directly support research in the state, with the condition that the use of the funds had to directly benefit a Montana industry. In cooperation with Governor Steve Bullock, the Montana Legislature and the Montana university system, the Montana Research and Economic Development Initiative allotted $15 million in seed money for projects in the research stage that would “solve Montana problems with Montana solutions.” Proposals from research universities poured in. The Optics Group at MSU was awarded $2.5 million to develop eight projects within two years in areas that range from medicine to projects like Paul Nugent’s agricultural system.

To Shaw, this industry crossover effect is essential to the well-being of the state.

“That’s what researchers do, we solve problems. We create new knowledge. We do things that we think are very valuable to the world, but we want to do them in a way that our local people know that we care and that we are helping,” he says.

Another avenue for promising discoveries is to channel them from the MSU optics lab into the guiding hands of Dr. Zeb Barber and his team at Spectrum Lab. Barber has a childlike giddiness about his work with light. Attracted to light’s odd behavior, he fell into physics.

Spectrum Lab was established in 1999 as a way to bridge the gap between MSU and industry. Through grant-based funding, it serves a transitional role in a place where good ideas can be stalled.

One such idea, being co-developed with Advanced Microcavity Sensors, the spin-off company taking it to market, involves using a set of mirrors—to small to be seen by the naked eye—to detect specific cells, such as those harboring skin cancer. When light shines on a skin cancer cell, it produces a different spectrum than a non-cancerous cell.

“Imagine the mirrors as miniature tuning forks,” Barber suggests. They resonate when a specific color of light interacts with them. Two mirrors form a cavity, just like in the laser that Maiman built. For the past two years, Spectrum’s team has been fine-tuning the technology of a single sensor, much of the work done by hand and with microscopes; the real challenge is in coming up with a way to produce millions of sensors on a wafer that could fit inside a medical camera.

Down a quiet gravel road in Bozeman lies an unassuming warehouse. It is here that Ralph Hutcheson made his start in Bozeman nearly 30 years ago. Inside, a row of machines consuming half a megawatt of energy hum away. Peer down one of the steel tanks through the dark lens on top and you look upon a crystal, literally as bright as the sun, growing in a molten, 4,000-degree womb. Dipped in a chemical bath, the crystal rotates steadily on a steel rod—temperature, pressure, chemical balance all neatly orchestrated to allow the chemicals to self-organize, building the crystal atom by atom. It may take several days or weeks. Once removed, the crystal looks like a dense stalactite, weighing several pounds. These are the engines of lasers.

The crystals grown here—garnet, sapphire, spinel—are present in nature, explains Zachary Cole, the current director of the Scientific Materials Corporation, now owned by FLIR Systems. However, growing them in a well-controlled environment means they can be grown to order and to perfection, their structures so accurate that their behaviors are predictable down to the atomic level. The purity in their crystals is a quality that makes them highly sought worldwide.

“Growing up I had a passion for the outdoors and the natural world, hunting, fishing, and generally spending as much time outdoors as possible,” Cole says. “In high school, for the first time, I discovered the beauty of math and physics, and was stunned to find that it was the language of our physical reality, the natural world.”

Like others involved in photonics, Cole feels the gravity of his work. Though it’s serious business, his eyes light up when he shows off orange erbium crystals, or when he speaks of the crystal his team is designing for a Mars mission, or talks about the passionate, nerdy scientists he surrounds himself with. He speaks for many in photonics when he says, “That’s just cool science.”
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A bird’s-eye view of the Confederate prison at Andersonville, Georgia, which by the end of the Civil War held more than 30,000 men.

The Defender

Montana pioneer J. M. Page survived Andersonville during the Civil War. Later, he backed a man accused of and hanged for war crimes there.

BY M. MARK MILLER
In the summer of 1866 a young Civil War veteran drove the last freight wagon in a train that crossed the Great Plains to the gold rush towns of Montana. He was Lieutenant James Madison Page, a survivor of the notorious Confederate prison at Andersonville, Georgia. His place at the end of the wagon train let him pick up the horseshoes that teams ahead of him had dropped. The boss of the wagon train hadn't stocked horseshoes or hired a farrier for the long trip, so Page taught himself to shoe horses with the salvaged iron.

As he traveled, he must have thought about the miseries of Andersonville—where he had been imprisoned just two years earlier. The Confederates built Andersonville Prison (its official name was Fort Sumter) in southwest Georgia near the end of the Civil War. They wanted it to be a model prison and when new it had adequate water and nearby supplies of wood. But it was built to house no more than 10,000 prisoners and by the end of the war more than 30,000 men were held there. Overcrowding and lack of food and medicine caused rampant hunger and suffering. A liberator who entered Andersonville after the war described the place as “a swamp” where once-healthy men were “walking skeletons covered with filth and vermin.”

Page couldn't have helped thinking about the trial of the man who ran the prison where nearly 13,000 Union soldiers died of starvation, disease and—according to official accusations—suffered intentional cruelty. In the summer of 1865, as Page was planning his move to the West, newspapers were filled with lurid stories about the war crimes trial of Major Henry Wirz, who ran the camp. Every prisoner who testified seemed to strive to tell a more gruesome tale than the one before.

One man said Wirz ordered guards to shoot any prisoner who crossed a “dead line” 15 yards back from the stockade wall—and rewarded men who carried out the order with a 30-day furlough.

Another man testified that he saw a guard throw a brickbat that hit Wirz on the shoulder. Wirz, the man said, didn't even try to find out where the missile came from. He simply drew his revolver and shot a prisoner.

A third witness said he saw Wirz abuse an exhausted man who could not walk fast enough to satisfy him. He threw the man down and stomped him, the witness said, and the bleeding man soon died.

These stories—and others like them—haunted Page as he made his way across the Plains picking up used horseshoes. They just didn't match his experience with Wirz, a man who Page said was kindhearted and did everything he could to ease the terrible afflictions of the prisoners at Andersonville.

Page had been subpoenaed as a witness at Wirz’s trial and was among several who wanted to testify for him but were never called. It would be decades before Page would try to right what he saw as the terrible injustice of the trial and execution of Henry Wirz for war crimes.


J. M. Page as he appeared in A History of Montana, published in 1913. Five years earlier, in 1908, Page published a book in which he argued that Major Henry Wirz, who was executed for war crimes at Andersonville Prison, was not guilty.
The book led to an effort to expel Page from the Montana Camp of the Grand Army of the Republic, the major organization for Union veterans of the Civil War. But it also earned him the gratitude of Southerners that lasts to this day.

Page waited to establish himself as one of Montana’s leading citizens before writing his book. He arrived in Virginia City on June 20, 1866, and made his way to the Madison Valley, where he tried wheat farming, before moving to a ranch in the Beaverhead Valley west of Twin Bridges, where he raised Belgian horses and short-horn cattle. Soon he owned nearly 1,700 acres across several ranches. He married a Danish immigrant, Mary Christianson, and the couple had four daughters.

Page recruited his siblings to join him, and the families settled between the Big Hole and Beaverhead rivers in an area that became known as “Pageville.” The Pageville School opened in 1883, taught by Page’s newly arrived niece, Eva, who at 18 was already an experienced teacher. Most of her 17 students were her siblings or cousins. The next year a one-room log schoolhouse was built on land donated by Page. Eight different Page descendants taught there until 1920 when the school consolidated with Twin Bridges. The Pageville Post Office opened in 1882 with Page’s nephew Newton as postmaster. It closed in 1913.

Before joining the Michigan Sixth Cavalry, Page had worked on a crew mapping upper Michigan and Minnesota and learned surveying, a profession he practiced for the rest of his life. Montana had to be surveyed before it could be homesteaded, and the federal government used private contractors for that until the World War I era. Page and his brothers sent multiple survey crews out every summer, hiring so many young men and sending them to such distant counties that unmarried Pageville women complained about a lack of suitors at home. By definition the surveys were in unsettled land and Page said he had “exciting” encounters with Indians in Yellowstone and Musselshell counties.

Page was the Madison County Surveyor for 15 years and the United States Mineral Surveyor for Montana and Idaho. A staunch Republican, Page served in the Montana Territorial Legislature in 1885 and in 1887, representing Madison and Beaverhead counties. He was appointed Montana’s state land agent in 1895. He was president of the Society of Montana Pioneers, department commander of the Montana branch of the Grand Army of the Republic, and president of Montana Mining Engineers. He was a master Mason, a member of the Knights Templar, and the Ancient Order of United Workmen.

With all these successes, Page must have thought he had enough credibility to right the wrongs that had haunted him for so long: the conviction and execution of Andersonville Commandant Henry Wirz. In his 60s, Page turned management of his survey company over to his nephew and began working on his exoneration of Wirz. He published the book with a co-author, M. J. Hale, in 1908, the year he turned 69. (A facsimile edition is still in print.)

In the book Page outlined his Civil War experiences.
Wirz was tried and hanged. Page, in his 1908 book, argued that Wirz made a convenient scapegoat.

He had enlisted in the Michigan Sixth Cavalry in August of 1862 and had soon found himself fighting with the Army of the Potomac. While his unit was pursuing General Robert E. Lee after the Battle of Gettysburg, Sergeant Page was given a field commission to second lieutenant.

While on patrol near Liberty Mills, Virginia, Page’s company of a few dozen men confronted a force of several hundred Confederates. He ordered a retreat and ran to a hiding place in high grass, but a squad of the Virginia Fifth Cavalry captured him.

Page was taken first to Richmond and then to Belle Island. He arrived at the then-new stockade at Andersonville on February 18, 1864. He was held until September 1864 when he was sent to Savannah and then home as a “sick man” in one of the last prisoner exchanges.

In his book, Page described what he experienced at Andersonville. He stated unequivocally that the horrendous acts Henry Wirz was executed for simply did not happen. He also described times when Wirz acquiesced to Page’s requests, such as allowing prisoners to tend gardens and gather wood outside the stockade walls.

Page said the dozen or so witnesses who claimed they saw Wirz personally commit acts of cruelty were lying. He said extreme crowding and boredom at Andersonville created a robust rumor mill but he heard no talk at the time of personal cruelty by Wirz. “While I was there I never heard nor never knew that Captain Henry Wirz was responsible for the death of a solitary prisoner.”

The men who testified against Wirz, Page argued, were part of a plot to divert blame for the suffering at Andersonville from President Lincoln’s Secretary of War,
Edwin M. Stanton. If Stanton had not ended prisoner exchanges with the Confederates, much of the suffering and death at Andersonville could have been prevented, Page maintained. Newspapers of the era had been saturated with horrific photographs and descriptions of Andersonville, so someone had to be blamed. Wirz, who was born in Switzerland and spoke English poorly, made a good scapegoat.

A star witness at the trial was a man who called himself “Felix de la Baume,” which turned out to be a false name. This witness testified to seeing several cruel acts by Wirz and that he witnessed most of the killings attributed to him. Page wrote of de la Baume, “His omnipresence while at Andersonville seemed something bordering on the supernatural. Nothing escaped him.”

Page’s book drew national attention. Newspapers in the old Confederacy praised it. For example, the Richmond, Virginia, Times-Dispatch said, “In the south this book should be used as a textbook in school, that the rising generation may know that the crime of Andersonville was the horrible judicial murder of an innocent man.”

Union newspapers were less sympathetic. The Saint Paul Appeal questioned Page’s motives for writing the book and said, “It would not be hard to guess who hired him to do it.” The National Tribune, published in Washington D.C., was sarcastic: “From Lieutenant Page’s story it might be inferred that this prison was a most pleasant resort, where in the summer season the prisoners were served with ice cream and sponge cake and during winter months with roast turkey and plum pudding.” It’s difficult to see how the Tribune inferred this. Page weighed 205 pounds when he was captured; 120 when he was released from Andersonville. The Tribune also asserted that Page was well treated because he was “obsequious” to his guards.

Controversy about Page’s book continued long after his death. In 1977, Montana, the Magazine of Western History published an article in its winter issue based on correspondence between Page and the Rev. James D. Spencer, a circuit-riding Baptist minister who first visited Pageville in 1888. Page and Spencer became friends and exchanged letters after Spencer returned east. The article
Page summarized Page’s argument that Wirz was unjustly tried and executed and stated, “Page was well ahead of his time, for it is generally conceded today that Henry Wirz had little or no control over horrors at Andersonville.”

Page suffered for his defense of Wirz. In a letter to Spencer, dated July 29, 1920, he said:

“It has brought me a good deal of cheap notoriety and abuse and my post (G.A.R.) at Helena preferred charges against me for disloyalty, but I shamed them out of it, and our State Department meeting held in Livingston last month unanimously endorsed me for the position as Department Commander.

In the next issue of Montana magazine, the famous western writer Dorothy M. Johnson said in a brief letter that she found the article on the Spencer correspondence “fascinating.” Johnson, the author of several famous stories, including “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence” and “A Man Called Horse,” considered herself an authority on Wirz because she had included a chapter on him in her book The Bedside Book of Bastards. Johnson said she had read the official transcript of the Wirz trial three times and, “The testimony given by some of the witnesses who suffered at Andersonville would make you want to vomit.” Apparently Johnson had not read Page’s book. She missed his central argument that the trial was a sham and the witnesses were lying.

Controversy about the trial of Henry Wirz erupts every time Ken Burns’ famous television documentary series The Civil War is rebroadcast. Burns shows horrendous photographs of Andersonville and simply notes that Wirz was convicted of “war crimes,” but that’s enough for defenders of the Confederacy to cry foul. In their defense of Wirz, they always thank Page. As one of them put it, “We are deeply indebted to James Madison Page for his courage in telling the unpopular truth at a time when few wanted to hear it.”

Late in life Page sold his ranch and moved to Long Beach, California. He died there three years later in 1924 at the age of 84. He is buried in the Twin Bridges Cemetery under an impressive tombstone emblazoned with the insignia of the Grand Army of the Republic and the words “Montana Pioneer.”
That Famous Place

Put on the literary map by poets, the Dixon Bar retains a cantankerous nostalgia for an older Montana

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS LaTRAY
I’m imagining a particular history myself as I stomp across the threshold of the place and squint into dim light cast over a wildly cluttered backbar along the left wall of the room. September blusters outside and the gunmetal clouds and wind send rain seemingly in all directions at once. In the opposite corner of the tiny barroom—past a sewing machine, a couple saddles, a wheelchair under a blanket—huddles an old wood stove. It brings to mind dark afternoons and nights during winters past, wind and snow howling, when that stove and the bartender were the only thing keeping the cold at bay for many of the town’s residents and passers-by. At least the sociable ones, or those most committed to drink.

For owner Bud Schmauch, those scenes aren’t imaginings, they’re memory. The bar has been in his family since 1951, when his mother and father—Joanne and Richard “Tiger” Schmauch—took over the place. Bud, a third-generation Montanan born in Butte, was seven. His mother was behind the bar for 52 years, right up until three days before she died in 2002 at the age of 80. It’s those older days in Dixon that I first ask Bud about.

“Probably about the same number of people in town, but the living conditions were different,” Schmauch says. “Everyone had a well in...
their backyard, and an outhouse. You didn’t have city this, or city that. So you pumped your own water. And there was a ditch, an irrigation ditch, that run through town. Everybody had a bridge to cross the ditch to their house.”

He pauses to demand chocolate, and his wife of two years—her name is Joanne, too, and just like his mother she’s a redhead—brings him a candy bar.

“The river was used for subsistence,” Schmauch says. “Huntin’. Fishin’. Trappin’. That kind of stuff. It wasn’t the luxury thing that it is today. Of course there was a bridge there at that time too. The tribe took that out. They didn’t want anybody over there so they took it out. Which, who cares, it’s their bridge. It was a better lifestyle then, it was before drugs. The drug culture has ruined everything. It’s terrible. There’s no work ethic, there’s nothing.”

The first time I visited the Dixon Bar was only a couple months prior. That time there were maybe half-a-dozen other folks on hand, chatting each other up. Many of them, Joanne Schmauch included, were also smoking, illegal in Montana since 2009. When the lone other patron of the bar this afternoon shakes out an American Spirit and prepares to light up,
Joanne shakes her head and gestures.

“We have to go outside,” she says. “Bud just quit smoking last week.” With a wink at me and a stage whisper in Bud’s direction, she concludes, “And he’s really cranky.”

Bud and I are alone in the bar. I want a story, something dangerous from back in Dixon’s day. Something wild, something that reads well. Schmauch isn’t particularly forthcoming.

“A story?” he says, almost in a sneer.

“Yeah,” I say. “What’s the craziest thing you’ve ever seen happen in here? Has anyone ever come in here waving guns or knives or anything?”

Schmauch’s eyes go wide. “You think?” he says. He reaches around his hip and draws, then slams down on the bar, what looks to me to be a .38 pistol. “You think people come in here with an effing gun? Huh?”

I’m a little alarmed. Not because I’m afraid of guns, but because I hadn’t even noticed he was carrying one. In defense of my own eyesight, I will say that Schmauch is wearing a long western shirt, untucked. He’s spinning the pistol slowly on the bar, his finger looped in the trigger guard. He leans back on his stool and looks me in the eye. “Everybody knows I carry a gun,” he says. “They’re not gonna contest me.”

My tension is eased when the Schmauch’s cat, a pretty Siamese named Polar Bear, hops up on the bar. Bud strokes her back a couple times and quips, “If we ever have to leave the bar,” he says, a wry grin twisting his lips, “we like to say we leave the oriental girl in charge.”

What originally brought me to the Dixon Bar was curiosity born from the same incident that has brought so many here before me, and Schmauch knows it. “I suppose you’re waiting to ask me about the three stooges,” he says. He’s right.

The general backstory—and by now it’s difficult to separate the truth from the apocryphal—is this. In 1970, poets Richard Hugo, James Welch and J.D. Reed stopped in the bar after a day fishing on the river. Hugo was
something of a regular. As the drinking continued, the three decided they would each write a poem called “The Only Bar in Dixon.” Which they did, and on October 10, 1970, all three were published in the *New Yorker* magazine. That feat alone is astounding, but it was the content of the poems that lit some fuses in Dixon. Racist toward Indians, it was thought, and denigrating of the town itself. As for the subject bar’s proprietor, Welch wrote, “Take the redhead—yours for just a word.” This didn’t sit well with “the redhead,” Schmauch’s mother, who wrote a scathing letter to the *Missoulian* that Hugo then responded to with no show of remorse. In some ways, it created a touchstone that Hugo wrote about several times subsequently, in how poets and poetry relate to their surroundings, truthfully or otherwise.

I ask Schmauch for his side, his version, of the story.

“You want a version, or do you want the truth?” he says. “It’s not a story, it’s the truth. I’m the only one here that can verify anything. And there’s nobody here that’s gonna call me a liar.”

Did it change things in Dixon?

“Do you think they had that much influence?” Schmauch says. “Who cares about the effing *New Yorker*? They were egomaniacs. They were drunks. Three of the worst I’ve ever seen. Arrogant. Rude. Dirty. Physically dirty. No class. Absolutely no class.”
Finally, do people still come from all over the country to visit the bar?

“Not so much anymore. They know how I feel about it,” Schmauch says.

The publishing of the three *New Yorker* poems, and the aftermath, have created a curious relationship between the bar and Richard Hugo. I don’t doubt for an instant the legitimacy of Schmauch’s bitterness toward Hugo and the poems. But even as he argues that the incident changed nothing in Dixon, there’s no doubt Hugo and company brought decades of patrons and curiosity seekers who otherwise never would have heard of Dixon the town, let alone its “only” bar (there’s now a second one just down the street). A display featuring the poems hangs on the wall. With pride Joanne produces an internet print-out showing that, in 2005, the Academy of American Poets designated the bar as one of 31 National Poetry Landmarks. Most of these sites are the homes or birthplaces of famous poets such as Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, or cultural landmarks like City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco. But, right there at number 20, is the Dixon Bar, Dixon, Montana.

Bud Schmauch is old-school Montanan. Ornery and short-tempered. Not a politically correct bone in his body. He is a self-described patriotic veteran, even though he blames the VA for failure to treat health problems caused by Agent Orange during three tours in Vietnam. He supported Donald Trump because he doesn’t believe Hillary Clinton is “a patriot.” He is a lot of what I am not. Yet, I enjoy speaking with him and hearing his stories, and if you are respectful he will fill your ear with them. When it’s time to leave, he offers hope that I come back, that I’m “welcome as the flowers in spring.” Few bars of such atmosphere—where one chuckles at the general offensiveness of the hand-printed signs adorning the walls and accepts them as such or simply leaves—remain in Montana. And I do plan to return.

Back to that famous bar in Dixon.
THE SOLD-OUT CROWD STIRRED IN ANTICIPATION as the headlining movie of the Montana Film Festival shifted into its final scenes.

On the screen, a rancher slides open a barn door, admitting weak winter light into the barn’s darkness. Outside, a shaggy horse waits in the icy yard with the snow-capped Bridger Mountains in the distance.

At first, the rancher is just a silhouette wearing a bulky Carhartt jacket and a knitted Norwegian hat pulled low. She could almost be any Montana ranch hand plodding through her daily chores.

Later, a close-up reveals the rancher as she chews a lonely dinner in front of the television. Framed by raven hair flattened by hat and sweat, her round face is young and unadorned, appearing honest, almost simple. Propped against a rough particleboard wall, she stares at the fuzzy TV program with wide, dark eyes.

Throughout the rest of the movie, that face epitomizes something Marlon Brando once said: “In a close-up, the audience is only inches away, and your face becomes the stage.”

That entrancing stage belongs to Lily Gladstone, a Missoula-based actor who is getting a lot of
notice outside of Montana for her role in a new movie, *Certain Women*. Directed by independent filmmaker Kelly Reichardt and based on three short stories by Helena native Maile Meloy, *Certain Women* was chosen to debut at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival last January.

Hollywood actors Laura Dern and Michelle Williams got top billing, but Gladstone caught the eyes of many a Sundance reviewer. *The Hollywood Reporter* called the 30-year-old an “outstanding discovery.” *Rolling Stone* magazine said she stole the show and listed her as one of 12 breakout stars from Sundance. The Independent Filmmaker Project agreed on October 20, identifying Gladstone as a Gotham Award nominee for Best Breakthrough Actor. The winner was to be announced on November 28.

Gladstone admitted she was somewhat intimidated before filming when she learned who her co-stars would be. But she didn’t hold back.

“I told myself, ‘Just don’t think about it.’ Then that kind of became a little bit of a mantra for my character. It’s even a line in the movie,” Gladstone said.

Gladstone’s character, Jamie, follows a fateful impulse one night and ends up sitting in the back of a class about education law. She befriends the teacher, Beth, played by Kristen Stewart, a bedraggled young lawyer who drives more than 250 miles to teach the class. Jamie grows attached as the two talk, night after night, in a small café where Beth eats before driving home.

For Beth, Jamie is a way to pass the time. She doesn’t relate to Jamie’s loss when she suddenly stops teaching, nor Jamie’s humiliation after driving through the night to the lawyer’s office in a desperate attempt at connection.
“I’m hard to place ethnically, age-wise, even in my sexuality and my gender, depending on what character I’m going for. But I think that’s good. That’s our word for a medicine person—an all-face person.”

Meloy’s favorite scene follows as Jamie, her face impassive, turns from an indifferent Beth and climbs back into the farm truck. She drives away, and the camera lingers on Jamie’s face as her eyes flicker through an array of feelings. Slight confusion and disappointment. Embarrassed self-reproach—“What did you expect?” Finally, rejection and heartbreak. But she stifles any outburst with a brief chewing of the lower lip. As the taciturn rancher turns onto the highway for a long, lonesome drive home, few are left to question the turmoil Jamie is trying to choke down.

The Missoula crowd thundered its appreciation for its hometown star, much as others have done at screenings in New York, Toronto, Canada, and Vienna, Austria. Montana filmmaker Andrew Smith was in the Missoula audience and was not surprised with Gladstone’s performance. He’s seen it before.

“Her face—that incredibly compassionate face that she has—she doesn’t have to say anything to embody a lot of emotion. She has one of those expressive faces like a silent film actress, like [Greta] Garbo or [Lillian] Gish, where it’s all done with the eyes, the jaw, and … just presence,” Smith said.

In Certain Women, that presence had a certain male vibe to it.

In Meloy’s short story “Travis B,” the rancher is a Native American named Chet, which creates some racial and sexual tension as he spends more time with Beth. But a few months before filming started, Reichardt changed Chet into a woman. Meloy didn’t know that until she saw the movie, but the change made sense since her story dwells on Chet’s thoughts, which are hard to convey on film.

“Making the Chet character a woman, when Beth seems to be straight, externalized the feelings of insecurity and uncertainty—and the unlikeliness of the longing being repaid—in a really beautiful way,” Meloy said. “There’s a slight suggestion of gender fluidity in Lily’s Jamie that seems like a nod to the original character.”

Being half Native American, Gladstone naturally projected the Indian aspect of Meloy’s character. But it also wasn’t much of a struggle for her to incorporate some of Chet’s masculinity, thanks to her Blackfeet upbringing and the Native American concepts of shape-shifters and Two Spirit—referring to people of ambiguous gender.

“I really appreciated being able to gender-bend this character,” Gladstone said. “But I felt a little bad that there might have been an incredibly gifted [male] native actor who would have soared in this role.”

Gladstone has worked with several gifted native actors on previous projects, including the Smith brothers’ 2013 movie, Winter In the Blood. It was touted as her first big opportunity, but Smith had her in mind for the part five years earlier, when she was graduating from the University of Montana Drama Department.

Harvard University had tried to recruit Gladstone for its drama program. But she chose UM, partly for its Native American Studies program and partly because of James Welch’s book Winter In the Blood.

After spending the first 11 years of her life on the Blackfeet Reservation, Gladstone moved with her parents to Seattle, where she learned to act like someone else in order to fit into a big-city school. As a teenager, she identified with the struggle of Welch’s protagonist to find his identity when he is denounced as a half-breed by whites and Blackfeet alike. So when she read the book’s foreword and discovered that Welch was a UM graduate—his widow, Lois Welch, also taught English there for many years—she chose to become a Grizzly.

When Gladstone showed up in Greg Johnson’s acting class, he could tell the freshman was different. Her drive and work ethic stood out, but also, “There was just a brightness about her.” A few years later, he wasn’t disappointed when he cast her in two Montana Repertory Theater roles, neither of which were Native American.

But when there was a part for a native actor in a 2008 reading of Smith’s early draft of the Winter In the Blood screenplay, Johnson immediately chose Gladstone to play Marlene, a woman who befriends the down-and-out
protagonist only to be physically abused by him. Smith, an associate professor in the Media Arts department, had already seen her act in some of his students’ films.

“Lily just struck us as someone who is so real, so we cast her as Marlene,” Smith said. “I knew she could do film, which, with a lot of theater actors, has a steep learning curve. But she got it immediately.”

Her ability was key to getting the part, but so was her native look and understanding of the story.

But for Gladstone, her look can be a double-edged sword. For those who don’t know her, her face hints at an Asian or Latin American heritage, even though her teenage Seattle classmates usually assumed she was white. Such a malleable appearance has been an advantage when she plays Japanese-American, Mexican and Navajo roles in Living Voices, a nationwide theater company that features monologues on social-justice issues.

“I’m hard to place ethnically, age-wise, even in my sexuality and my gender, depending on what character I’m going for. But I think that’s good. That’s our word for a medicine person—an all-face person. You can enact great empathy for a lot of different varieties,” Gladstone said.

Most of the time, however, Gladstone is identified as Native American, which helped her get parts in both *Winter In the Blood* and *Certain Women*. But she’s been passed over in some cases because directors think she looks either too Indian or “not native enough.” Part of the problem, Gladstone said, is directors tend to want actors who appear full-blooded for period pieces. Very few movies depict real lives of modern Indians. That irks Smith.

“Being not-Indian-enough is such a racist idea, as if there was one way Indians look. If directors have a pre-existing idea about who she is supposed to be, then casting directors will have their work cut out for them,” Smith said. “But her talent surpasses any ethnic barrier or assumption. Directors who understand acting will recognize what they see as quality.”

Reichardt apparently did.

Before *Certain Women*, Gladstone had gotten enough rejections that she almost gave up acting. She refers to the day Reichardt called as “prey runs to the hunter.” It’s a phrase her Blackfeet/Nez Perce father uses to describe the moment when things fall into place because a person stayed true to themselves.

“It’s not about hunting something, it’s about letting it come to you,” Gladstone says of her growing career.
The Reviews Are In ...

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Pulled from the first decade of Montana Quarterly, the state’s most honored magazine, these are stories by veteran writers unafraid to grab a paddle, crawl in a hole, or stare down the ghosts of war or drug abuse or memory. Their eyes are clear. And they don’t forget to have some laughs along the way.

It’s about real life in a real place, warts and all.

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It’s a Fishy Future

STORY AND PHOTO BY SCOTT MC MILLION

Back in the 1990s, Mike Finley, then the superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, welcomed a group of scientists there to determine if elk had overgrazed the park. He said something like this:

“I welcome science. I’m a scientist. But science isn’t the only thing. I’ve already got three federal judges helping me to manage this park.”

I thought of this exchange when I spotted delicate butterflies in my yard a couple days after the November election, when it was 70 degrees in Livingston.

I had enjoyed ripe tomatoes from a friend’s garden, right off the vine and unblemished by frost, until just before Halloween.

These pleasures rattled me a little, mostly because of what I’d seen on my last Yellowstone River trip of the year, in August, when I found so many dead whitefish that I quit counting them. They were belly-up in every little eddy for miles, and I was puzzled. So was everybody else. Turns out the killer was a microscopic parasite invigorated by warm water, low flows and quite possibly by the stress from a steady stream of boaters throwing shadows and hooks over the remaining pools, refuges for fish that had already endured a summer of catches and releases.

Governor Steve Bullock showed up grim-faced and Montana government shut down 183 miles of the river for a few weeks, hoping to keep the malady from spreading while biologists and other scientists tried to figure out what to do. Now the same microbe has been detected in several other streams in southwest Montana, though so far without the same die-off. And still, nobody is sure quite what to do about it.

Green activists pointed fingers at irrigators who drain tributaries to grow feed for the cattle that make our dwindling open space economically viable. The closure dealt a blow to outfitters, guides and fly shops, and some grumbled about government forcing this industry to suffer all the losses while the ditches flowed and the wheel lines ran day and night. When I talked to ranchers, I noticed a certain tightening of the jaw, heard references to longstanding legal rights, and implications that their life isn’t a piece of cake either.

This isn’t the first time a tiny creature has knocked Montana for a loop. For many years, we’ve watched forests turn red and then gray, slain by pine beetles energized by our shorter, milder winters. They’re even in the high country, killing whitebark pine trees that have no resistance to the bugs, no evolutionary history with them because in the past the beetles couldn’t survive the harsh weather up on those far ridges. Dead trees at the edges of the alpine affects grizzly bears and how they travel, snow and how it melts, rivers and how they flow.

Are there solutions? Maybe. But if science has some answers, it will get help from lawyers and judges.
Into the Infernos

AN INTERVIEW WITH GARY FERGUSON BY KRIS KING

Red Lodge resident and nature writer Gary Ferguson’s latest book is a master class in wildfires; the myriad human and ecological factors contributing to their escalation, the expansive environmental and financial impacts, and the efforts to prevent and mitigate fire damage. Every page reinforces wildfire’s relevancy in our lives: “Just as fire has long shaped the ecology of the American West and will for centuries to come, so will it increasingly shape the lives of human communities."

Land on Fire’s highly readable narrative untangles complex scientific and dense technical concepts into clear lines illuminating wildfire’s
intricate cycles. This slim, elegant volume is enhanced by more than 100 color photos, many by firefighter and photographer Kari Greer, diagrams, and even a wildfire property protection checklist. Readers will be left with a comprehensive understanding of wildfire causes, effects and critical strategies as we face a future of increasing wildfire.

The best-selling and award-winning author of more than 20 nonfiction books and many articles, Ferguson is a frequent lecturer and keynote speaker. He’s had a residency at the Rainier Writing Workshop Masters of Fine Arts program at Pacific Lutheran University for a decade. Ferguson lives in Red Lodge and Portland with his wife, Mary Clare, a cultural psychologist.

Montana Quarterly: What do you want people to know going into Land on Fire?

Gary Ferguson: I’d like them to know that bigger, hotter wildfires in the American West are here to stay. In some places the size and increasing frequency of these burns may actually change the landscape; in the Southwest and parts of California, lands that have held forests for over a thousand years may be turning into grasslands and shrublands.

Of course this story has a big human component, too. Right now about 130 million people—more than a third of our country’s population—live in the so-called wildland-urban interface; places at high risk for wildfire. Incredibly, more than 80 percent of that interface has yet to be developed.

Finally, while many of us think of this problem as a result of past fire suppression policies—letting fuel loads build up over many decades—that’s just part of the story. Plain and simple, this is a climate change issue—from deepening droughts that either kill trees outright or leave them vulnerable to attacks by insects and pathogen, to dwindling snow packs, to stronger winds fanning the flames. Climate change isn’t just some big downer. Accepting it and dealing with it can be a path that will lead to a more generous, more empowered way of being in the world.

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much of what being human is all about consists of fulfilling the longing for those three qualities. Also, that our frustrations, the anger and hopelessness and collapse of character we feel—and many writers chronicle—is often from those things being blocked in our lives.

**MQ:** What do you enjoy about speaking engagements?
**GF:** Given the solitary nature of writing, it’s an enormous pleasure to interact with people in a live event. There’s a feeling of exploring things together and a rhythm—the musicality of traditional storytelling—where the story is understood as an act of co-creation.

**MQ:** Can you briefly address your most personal book, *The Carry Home*, published last year?
**GF:** I’m extremely proud of that book. As far as I’m concerned, I’ve never written anything better. At its root, *The Carry Home* is a story that arises from 25 years in the outdoors with my first wife, Jane, who died in a canoeing accident in 2005, as well as my subsequent trips, as per her earlier request, to scatter her ashes in her five favorite wild places. But the book also reflects on how wilderness shapes us, how it serves the culture at large, and on a very deep level.

**MQ:** Did you spend more time researching or writing *Land on Fire*?
**GF:** More time researching. Wildfire brings forth, even in experts, lots of questions and best guesses. Of course that’s how science works. (And really, we’d all do well to stop insisting that science give us immediate, irrefutable answers.) It takes a lot of careful work to pull out the threads of what’s most likely going on right now from an ecological perspective—and trickier still, how climate change will alter or amplify those processes in the decades to come. For a writer, a subject like this is like going into a wilderness: I have to keep my eyes and ears open, ask questions of trustworthy people, and be willing to be surprised, inconvenienced, and have my most cherished assumptions knocked about a bit.

**MQ:** Who do you see as the audience of *Land on Fire*?
**GF:** I imagine a great many people who, like me, live in the wildland-urban interface. People who are increasingly under the influence of fires and are thirsty for knowledge about what they are up against in the years to come. Yet this is also a book that will leave you feeling you’re not alone; that there’s a team of people working very hard to help us in the fine art of living in an age of fire.
The Driving Power of Conflict

There are many ways an author can draw readers into a book: compelling characters, emotionally powerful storylines, palpable settings, masterful use of language, and perhaps most importantly, conflict. As John le Carré said: “The cat sat on the mat is not a story. The cat sat on the dog’s mat is a story.” Three new books by Craig Lancaster, Allen Morris Jones, and David Quammen are fueled by strong conflicts that keep their stories hurtling forward to their inevitable ends. Lancaster’s protagonist struggles with Asperger’s Syndrome and clashes with the people he’s closest to. Jones’s main character wrestles with himself and his tragic past. David Quammen’s book explores the complicated and highly contentious issues surrounding our beloved Yellowstone National Park. All three of these writers know how to keep us turning the pages.

EDWARD UNSPOOLED
By Craig Lancaster | Missouri Breaks Press, softcover, 286 pages, $14.95

If there is one overarching reason to read Craig Lancaster’s “Edward” novels, it’s Edward Stanton. He’s one of the most fascinating characters to come along in a while: both endearing and exasperating, highly flawed but lovable, and utterly original.

We first met Edward in Lancaster’s breakout novel 600 Hours of Edward when he had fallen down the rabbit hole of his Asperger’s Syndrome. Edward’s unchecked behavioral oddities left him friendless, jobless, in legal trouble for harassing the country music star Garth Brooks, and completely isolated from the world around him. Through therapy and medication, he slowly learns to manage his condition enough to connect with others and reclaim his life.

At the beginning of Lancaster’s current novel, Edward Unspooled, Edward is married and expecting his first child. He has come a long way, but despite his successes he is still wrestling with his own idiosyncratic behaviors. He’s obsessed with recording detailed data on the weather, his exact waking times, and even the times and places of “sexual congress” with his wife. He ritualistically watches and re-watches old Dragnet reruns. He kisses his wife eight times every morning and eight times every evening, and he becomes agitated if any of his routines are altered.

“I have a fact-loving brain,” Edward declares repeatedly. “I don’t like conjecture. ... I don’t like hope. I prefer facts.” Having a child on the way awakens Edward’s paralyzing fear of uncertainty. He worries about the “hundreds of things that can go wrong in pregnancy and childbirth.” He frets about whether the child will “emerge from the womb an asshole and make our lives miserable.” His wife Sheila suggests he write letters to their unborn child as a way to deal with his anxieties, and those letters form the structure of this book, an epistolary novel that is crackling with humor and pathos and the universal struggles of everyday life.

Perhaps Edward’s most socially challenging behavior is his tendency to blurt out whatever he’s thinking with little thought of how it will affect others, which causes ongoing friction with the people around him. Yet it is this very characteristic that makes spending time with Edward so enjoyable. In a world that often rewards duplicity, a world that favors superficial hypocrisy over genuine sincerity, it’s pleasantly refreshing to hang out with someone as straightforward and uncomplicated as Edward Stanton. Even though society labels his directness as abnormal, it makes him a rare and treasured thing: an honest man. We can’t help agreeing with him when he says: “Some people are ... unable to say things simply and directly. ... It must make them feel better or more important. ... Such people are not to be trusted.”

Edward Unspooled is the story of one man in conflict with himself and the world, a man who finds a way to live life to the fullest in spite of, or maybe even because of, his flaws and setbacks. There is universal appeal to this literary hero’s journey: if Edward can overcome his seemingly insurmountable problems, then perhaps we...
can all rise above the messy challenges of our lives. At one point Sheila says: “Your ways don’t always make sense to me, but I love you.” Readers with any heart will feel the same way.

**A BLOOM OF BONES**

By Allen Morris Jones | Ig Publishing, softcover, 232 pages, $16.95

**WHENEVER I READ AN ALLEN MORRIS JONES STORY, I’m always amazed that such powerful, explosive writing comes out of such a quiet and unassuming man. Jones is a meticulous sculptor of narrative with a keen eye for story and a clear love of language. His new novel, *A Bloom of Bones*, is both a traditional murder mystery and a literary investigation into the complicated formation of self.**

Jones starts the book off with a bang. In the first chapter we watch in horrified awe as Buddy and his 12-year-old stepson Eli bury a body on their ranch, a task that requires sawing off legs with a knife and shoveling the stiffening body into its not-so-final resting spot. What magnifies the intensity of this scene is the fact that the gruesome act takes place without any explanation or context. There is no mention of how the dead man, Pete, met his demise or why these two seemingly likable people are burying him in such a ghastly manner. They are just taking care of business, disposing of the body with the same matter-of-fact practicality they would use if they were fixing fence or feeding cattle.

The second chapter jumps to 30 years later. Buddy has died, and Eli is an acclaimed poet still living on the Rattletrap Ranch near Jordan, Montana. Chloe, his literary agent from New York, comes to visit, and a love affair sparks between the rural writer and the urbane Chloe. She has tattoos of Vonnegut around her ankle and Rilke down her back; he has the scars of place: a kneecap ripped by barbed wire, a shoulder pocked with birdshot, a foot split with an axe. She comes from the New York literati; his poetry is infused with the “suction slip of intestines from a deer, the hot wash of amniotic fluid from a heifer, the weighty obligations of an unfixed fence.” But the past has a way of punching its way into the present. Pete’s body erodes from the hillside, and Eli is immediately under suspicion by the small town that never truly accepted him as one of its own.

The book moves back and forth between Eli’s childhood and the present, gradually painting an intricate portrait of rural ranching life on the vast windswept plains of eastern Montana. We come to know his stepfather’s pragmatism, his mother’s depression and increasing instability, and his 14-year-old sister’s adolescent yearnings that can never be fully quenched on that hardscrabble ranch in the middle of nowhere. “To the east, it was fifty miles of dirt until you hit the two
saloons and five churches of Jordan; to the west, nothing but the Musselshell.” Whereas his sister wants only to break away from her stark life, Eli embraces his role as the adopted son of a rancher, learning the ropes while also trying to emulate the toughness and stoicism that he thinks are valued in this brutal place.

Eventually we learn what happened on that fateful day 30 years ago, but more importantly we learn why it happened, how the harsh and beautiful landscape can shape the people who live there in the same way a hillside is carved by wind and water.

Jones’s fierce writing, his knack for creating complex stories and nuanced characterization, and his ability to bring to life the beauty and terror of the Montana landscape earns *A Bloom of Bones* a place on your bookshelf between *This House of Sky* and *Winter in the Blood*.

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**YELLOWSTONE: A Journey Through America’s Wild Heart**

*By David Quammen | National Geographic Books, hardcover, 224 pages, $28*

David Quammen has been writing about science and nature for more than 30 years, from his early “Natural Acts” column in *Outside* magazine to his most recent book, *Yellowstone: A Journey Through America’s Wild Heart*. Quammen is a boots-on-the-ground investigative journalist who transforms his observations and research into powerful narratives about humans and the natural world. He knows how to bring science alive on the page, whether he’s thrilling us with tales of deadly viruses and man-eating tigers or breathing life into Charles Darwin and island biogeography.

In *Yellowstone*, he takes on the magnificent grandeur and tangled controversies of our first national park. The book is an expansion of the recent *National Geographic* issue on Yellowstone, the first issue ever written by one author—Quammen. The photography in this book is stunning. Along with Todd Wilkinson’s informative captions, the lavish imagery adds a deeper dimension to our understanding of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Yellowstone is a hotspot in more ways than one. It’s a wonderland of geysers, fumaroles, and mud pots, but with four million visitors it is also boiling over with the numerous conflicts that swirl at the nexus between humans and nature. Quammen provides a fascinating overview of these complex issues. We introduce lake trout into Yellowstone Lake, nearly wiping out native cutthroat trout and causing unintended consequences for grizzlies, elk, bald eagles, and trumpeter swans. We bring in diseased cattle that infect bison and elk (but not elk) ostensibly to keep them from re-infecting cattle. We exterminate wolves, a key predator in the ecosystem, and then we reintroduce them, but “restoring wolves to Yellowstone ... does not necessarily fix all the problems that removing wolves from Yellowstone caused. ... Everything is connected. That’s the first lesson not just of ecology but also of resource politics.”

“Yellowstone is a wild place. Sort of,” Quammen says. “It’s a wild place that we have embraced, surrounded, encompassed, riddled with roads and hotels and souvenir shops, but not tamed, entirely. It’s filled with wonders of nature—fierce animals, deep canyons, scalding waters—that are magnificent to behold but fretful to engage. ... Walk just 200 yards off road ... and you can be killed and eaten. ... This is the paradox of Yellowstone and of most other national parks in America that we have added since: wilderness contained, nature under management, wild animals obliged to abide by human rules. It’s the paradox of the cultivated wild.”

There are no easy answers to these dilemmas, but one thing is clear: humans have an oversized and increasingly detrimental effect on the other species we live with. Whether we’re building McMansions in the middle of ancient migration corridors or we’re loading a bison calf into the back of our SUV, the wild animals are often the ones who pay the price for our careless actions. So how do we save this special place? The answer “isn’t more hotels, roads, and parking lots. If anything, the human footprint needs to shrink to protect the wildlife.” We need to better understand the ecosystem we live in; we need to adopt a “tone of humility” in landscape; and we need to find less invasive ways to move into the future. This book is an excellent place to start.
When to Play Dead

BY SHAWN VESTAL

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN GRAVAGE
“A black bear will run away if you charge at them,” the father told them, “while it’s better with a grizzly to play dead.”

Somewhere in the Rocky Mountains was where they were. The campground was laid out in a series of loops, each loop curled around a new brick bathroom with quarter-fed showers. If you walked just away from camp, you could see across a field of mountains for a hundred miles. For a thousand miles. And still: full damn bars.

“You must filter water from the stream,” the mother told them, though there was a shiny silver spigot right in camp, “or you might get giardia. My dad used to call it beaver fever.”

In the tent, the boy was watching a show about wisecracking teenage boys, and the girl was watching a show about wisecracking teenage girls. The father and mother were arranging the equipment, placing the mats, gauging the relationship between cooler and stove. Dinner was chicken and rice pilaf. The father and mother argued about whether the chicken was still a little pink. The father said, “The pioneers never worried about pink chicken,” and the mother said, “Except for the ones who died of salmonella poisoning,” and the father said, “They didn’t have salmonella back then.”

At night, each on their phones in their sleeping bags on their massive air mattresses, they could hear the young people in the next camp. Cans cracking wetly open. Baritone belches. Dude and No way and Whoo. Bursts of aggressive laughter. The loose, awkward strumming of a guitar, and then a woman’s voice, singing, taking itself seriously. It went on and on and on and on. The father turned angrily in his sleeping bag, furious nylon shuzzings, and the mother exhaled as loudly as she could, and the boy and the girl tapped messages on their phones, thumbs spider-legging in the miracle glow. It was almost morning when they heard someone urinating on the fire, hard streams and potent hissing, and then it went quiet.

The father wanted to go for a hike. The girl wanted to know what made a hike any different from a walk. “Nothing, I guess,” said the father, and the girl said, “So why would I want to go for a dumb walk?” and the father said, “To see a part of the world—the untouched world, in all its beauty and wild splendor—that you might not otherwise see, to give yourself an appreciation for your place in the universe, to be reminded of our infinitesimal smallness,” and the girl said, “What about bears?”

“Bears don’t want to hurt you any more than you want to hurt them,” the father said.

The girl said, “Then why did you tell us when to play dead and when not to?” and the boy said, “What if I do want to hurt a bear? What then?” and the father said, “I don’t know where you kids are getting this mouth,” and the mother said, “It’s from the screens,” and the father said, “Maybe we should take them away,” and the girl said, “Just try it,” and the father shouted, “The smell of your screens attracts bears, your damn precious screens smell delicious to bears,” and the mother said, “James.”

The boy and the girl stepped very slowly into the camp of the rowdy neighbors. Their tents were silent. Crinkled tallboy beer cans sprawled everywhere. A twisting limb of smoke climbed from the fire pit, where an empty whisky bottle lay on its side,
charred. A hatchet stood erect, blade buried, upon
the picnic table beside a cooler with the lid askew
and a pie tin, bloody with fruit.

“You can always tell which way is north by looking
at the moss on trees,” the father said. “The moss is
always on the north side.”

The girl wanted to make the stick thingies from
*The Blair Witch Project* and leave them in front of
the tents for the rowdy neighbors to find. The boy
had never seen *The Blair Witch Project*—he said
horror movies were stupid, but the truth was that
they filled him with horror, as they were supposed
to, and made him feel that he was weaker than he
was expected to be—and he didn’t see how some
stick thingies would scare anybody or be any fun at
all. He picked up the hatchet and began looking for
something to hack.

“You should never dive into unfamiliar water,” the
mother said. “You can’t tell what’s just under the
surface, waiting to break your back for you.”

The father found himself unable to enjoy the
splendor of the hike. He could see a range of mountains that he knew the name of, with an off-kilter peak in the center of the range that he also knew the name of. They stomped past a field of unusual wildflowers, erect and columnar like cattails, with bursting purple heads. The father knew the name of the wildflowers. The mother wanted to talk about the loud kids in the campground next to them. She said, “If they’re not gone when we get back, someone really needs to talk to them.” The father said, “Someone will.”

The rowdy neighbors had two old-fashioned pup tents. The boy wanted to chop the guide ropes on the tents. He thought that would be funny. The girl wanted to pull out the stakes. That would be just as funny, wouldn’t it, without ruining their tents? The boy wanted to ruin their tents. Ruin them a little bit. It’s not like cutting the guide ropes would ruin the whole tent forever. The girl said when the boy got older he would have more respect for people’s belongings. Because the coverage was so good, so very strong, the girl looked up “scary stick thing blair witch” on her phone and showed the images to the boy. “Those are stupid,” the boy said. “Why can’t you see how stupid those are?”

The father had hiked way ahead of the mother. She came around a switchback and found him sitting on a log, looking at his phone. He said he was just checking a few emails. He said, “Can you believe the coverage?” She sat beside him and held up a phone to take their picture. “Don’t post that,” the father said. “We don’t want people to think we’re up here on our phones.”

“Check your whole body, every inch, for ticks,” the father said. “Once a day at least. No. Twice. No. Three times. Seriously. Look everywhere. Feel around.”

The girl rubbed a blackened campfire log, and smudged her face. The boy listlessly chopped at the picnic table. The girl shushed him. It was almost noon, yet neither one feared awakening the rowdy neighbors. The boy put down the hatchet and began picking up the empty beer cans. He arranged them in rows upon the picnic table.
“They sure drank a lot of beer,” he said. The girl opened the spigot on a plastic water bladder, letting the water run out. The boy took one of the folding chairs and carried it into the woods, and then came back for the others. The girl began scrawling messages in the dirt. HELLO LOUD PEOPLE. And, GO TO BED EARLY, DUMMIES. And, YOUR GUITAR PLAYING IS ATROCIOUS. The boy finished arranging the chairs around a tree in the woods, facing the tree like they had been facing the fire. He returned, got a stick of his own and wrote, YOUR BURPS SMELL LIKE FARTS. He opened the cooler and began removing items and throwing them into the woods: hot dogs, cream cheese, peanut-butter-filled pretzels. Someone in the tent stirred. The boy and the girl stopped still. From the tent came the sound of nylon sliding on nylon, and then a zipper, and then a groggy voice, saying, “Can you believe the coverage?” The boy walked quietly to the side of the tent and hacked at the guide rope but the hatchet bounced off it. The boy widened his eyes at the girl, and then reached down and yanked out one stake. A corner of the tent slumped. He yanked out another. The tent collapsed, then tipped. The boy and girl raced back to their camp, both noticing now how close they were, how easy it would be for the rowdy neighbors to hunt them down.

When the father and mother returned, they were surprised to find their son and daughter running back into the campsite, breathless and thrilled. The boy had a hatchet by the handle, swinging it as he ran. The father prepared to say something about that—“You should never run with any bladed tool, son!” or “Why can’t you think before you act, young man?” or “How long will I be saddled with this burden, this knowledge that I may fail to give you the very instruction that will save your careless life?”—but then he saw a boy from the neighboring camp, emerging from a fallen tent with hair like scrambling furry worms, and now heading toward him, and he remembered that they needed to be spoken with, these rowdy neighbors, that they needed to be reminded of how decent people treat each other when sharing the same corner of God’s wild and beautiful world.


Alan Kesselheim has written for the Montana Quarterly from its start and counts it among the most valuable outlets in his 30-year freelance career. He has written 11 books, most recently Montana: Real Place, Real People, with photographer Thomas Lee.

Kris King grew up in Montana and loves it anew with every season change. She’s been writing articles for a quarter century and has interviewed authors for Montana Quarterly since its inception. It’s her favorite writing gig ever.

Chris LaTray is a freelance writer and photographer from Missoula. His work has appeared in the Missoula Independent, the Missoulian, Knives Illustrated, Vintage Guitar, Montana, Alaska Airlines’ Beyond and World Explorer. His short fiction has been published in various noir/pulp collections and anthologies.

Laura Lundquist grew up in Bozeman but returned only a few years ago to be the environmental reporter for the local newspaper. Now she’s striking out on her own, hoping to join the incredible cadre of writers covering the environmental and outdoors stories of the region.


Alan Kesselheim has written for the Montana Quarterly from its start and counts it among the most valuable outlets in his 30-year freelance career. He has written 11 books, most recently Montana: Real Place, Real People, with photographer Thomas Lee.

Kris King grew up in Montana and loves it anew with every season change. She’s been writing articles for a quarter century and has interviewed authors for Montana Quarterly since its inception. It’s her favorite writing gig ever.

Chris LaTray is a freelance writer and photographer from Missoula. His work has appeared in the Missoula Independent, the Missoulian, Knives Illustrated, Vintage Guitar, Montana, Alaska Airlines’ Beyond and World Explorer. His short fiction has been published in various noir/pulp collections and anthologies.

Laura Lundquist grew up in Bozeman but returned only a few years ago to be the environmental reporter for the local newspaper. Now she’s striking out on her own, hoping to join the incredible cadre of writers covering the environmental and outdoors stories of the region.
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