



Winter again. I hunker back down into the damp season. Short gray days give way to long black nights while south winds rattle, unrelenting, at the door. (Here at the door: water will find its way through every unsealed seam, every last caulk-less crevice.) Wild surf yanks up kelp, the snaking *Nereocystis*, bullwhip with bulbous tip, and hurls it high on the beach amidst clots of yellow-white foam. Overhead, east-facing seagulls zip northward in an involuntary, tumbling migration. AND THERE IS THE RAIN. Pounding, drizzling, or intermittent. Showering, driving, pouring. Drenching. Stinging the face as it is blown hard and horizontal. (After a few generations on this wet west coast, locals have generated many words for the rain. Good, functional terms, metaphorical and meteorological, categorizing the force and frequency of each rain, the size, velocity, and variability of each drop. Like Eskimo words for snow. It's "hammering." It's "spitting." It's "misting." Best put on a proper coat.)

And by all means, wear some waterproof shoes. Mother wasn't kidding. A remarkably big chunk of this town sits on soggy spruce bogs, seasonal wetlands that have been filled and drained to make way for roads, shops, and shingled, faux-rustic micro-mansions. Not only do we live in a very wet land - we also live in wetlands. This time of year the water table pokes up above the surface to remind us. Puddles and impromptu creeks; backyards ponded up so deep you could stock them with largemouth bass. The tourists can fish there for a fee until things dry out. Sometime next June, maybe.

In their natural condition, though, wetlands are something to behold. Each wetland is a little different from the next, but they all share some distinctive characteristics. It should come as no surprise that they are, by most technical definitions, wet; they are covered with surface water for several days or weeks, cumulatively, out of the year.

Plants are different there - long periods of inundation would kill most terrestrial plants, but wetland plants are specially adapted, each species capable of being submerged for days, weeks, even months. Soils, too, are perpetually soggy; while ordinary forest soils are deep and rusty orange, wetland soils are often "anaerobic" with so little oxygen that organic debris rots very slowly, clays accumulate, and soil colors turn gray or black. (Perhaps this sounds familiar?)

Some of the most impressive wetlands in our region are found at the mouths of rivers and streams. Here, the daily rising and falling of the tides creates a unique assortment of wetland communities, well suited to the daily movements of tidal waters. Down by the mouth, where salt water mixes with fresh, there are green and grassy tidal flats, "salt marshes," lining the shoreline. Upstream, incoming tides back-up downstream flow, twice daily, creating one of those textbook Oddities of Nature: the freshwater tidal wetland. In all of these tidal wetlands we find a complex circuitry of meandering channels, a tangle of still waters tucked between rushing streams and churning sea.

These Northwestern coastal marshes are among the most productive lands on the face of the Earth, lush green intertidal meadows, producing more organic carbon per year, per square foot, than do our forests, farms, or fields. And at the root of this pronounced productivity we find vast piles of rotting gunk. Yes indeed: organic debris is key, carried there by water, tumbling down streams, or churned up and tossed there by ocean waves. Leaves, seaweed, dead organisms of all descriptions, algae - diverse and decomposing things are carried to the slow, calm waters at the river's mouth. There, stalled in backwater stillness, this stuff accumulates into rotting masses, termed "detritus" by in-the-know enthusiasts of rotting debris. Roughly a quarter of the organic material that enters the slow tidal backwaters is carried to the high tide mark in the form of detritus, producing long winding lines of high-tide junk. There, consumed by an assortment of "decomposers" - bacteria, insects, a host of wiggling invertebrate critters - this material serves as the foundation of a mighty food chain, feeding fish and birds, indirectly feeding those creatures by whom birds and fish are eaten. No doubt about it, salt marshes are essential to the salmon. Here, at the fringes of the salt marsh, salmon feed on the super-abundant populations of decomposers as they migrate, gathering in the slow-moving and diluted salty water, adjusting to the changing salinity, fattening themselves for the ocean or river journey ahead.

Go, have a look in-between rain storms, where the detrital crud clings to the uniquely adapted marsh plants - the fleshy succulent stems of *Salicornia* and Seaside Plantain, the purple daisy-like Aster flower and the yellow disk of "Brass Buttons," the Saltweed with leaves glistening with extruded salts, the sharp grass blades and dangling spikelets of Slough and Lyngbe's Sedge. Though Northwest marshes have taken much abuse in recent years, there are still some fine coastal marshes to be seen.

The native peoples of this coast knew that these marshes were important places. On the shores of the lower Columbia, where silts and detritus amass, freshwater intertidal marshes foster the growth of wapato, *Sagittaria latifolia*, with leaves of arrowhead shape, small white flowers, and tuberous roots. These roots, edible and tasty, were of tremendous importance to the Chinookan peoples who lived along this River. Villages were intentionally located near wapato patches and the harvest of wapato was a major social event. On the ocean coast, rapidly-growing patches of such plants as the slough (or "basket") sedge, *Carex obnupta* were harvested for basket weaving materials. But among all of the practices that made use of the tidal marsh's awesome productivity, none was as sophisticated as the cultivation of two marsh plants - the Pacific silverweed (*Potentilla anserina ssp. Pacifica*) - a plant with buttercup flower and symmetrically placed rose-like leaves) and the springbank clover (*Trifolium wormskjoldii*) a small clover with purple flowers and long oval leaves). These two plants grow naturally in the narrow band where detritus gathers deep, ground-zero in terms of marsh productivity. And both have edible roots, which don't taste half bad if you know the right recipes or the right times to harvest. Over the years, the peoples of the Northwest coast, particularly in British Columbia, learned to enhance the productivity of these edible plants. They would weed out competing plants, and pile up detritus on their root grounds. In some cases they would even transplant rootlets and build "raised beds", rock or log structures that expanded plots of these plants into the muddy or rocky tidal flats below. There are still a handful of Native people alive today who can recall, vaguely, when entire tidal flats were being managed in this way. And while such intensive gardening may not have been widespread on the northern Oregon coast, it is still quite clear that these hyper-productive plants were of much value to local tribes. They were the "yetska" roots, so prominent in Tillamook tales. And they were prominent in the placenames - the Tillamook name for Cannon Beach refers to the tide flats around the mouth of Ecola Creek. The term was Neshyetskawin, "place with lots of *Potentilla*," a good place to venture into the wetlands, gather roots, and eat. Since the arrival of our own peoples on this coast, edible marsh roots have gone out of style. Not recognizing the potential and productivity of the natural marsh, settlers were eager to dike, fill, and drain wetlands. The vast majority of Oregon's ancestral salt marshes are now buried below cow pastures, parking lots, and buildings. (Downtown Cannon Beach, like many of our coastal towns, is built atop fill, dumped there to carve construction sites out of the tidal marsh.) The salt marshes that exist today, only 11 square miles of them in the State, are largely new wetlands, built up atop silts deposited on old mudflats in the last hundred years, silts swept off of ragged logged hillslopes and deposited in tidal backwaters downstream. Dig down below these marshes and you are likely to find - not the archaeological traces of ancient root grounds - but turn-of-the-century clam flats, covered in wood chips, milled lumber, and remnant fragments of rusty old bolts. Old marshes can return, though, like a phoenix from the swamp. Here and there,

throughout the Northwest, people are beginning to experiment, removing dikes and fill, allowing the tides to reclaim the lowlands. And, here and there, it appears, detritus accumulates once again - the native plants, the native animals gradually return. These dynamic wet lands have the potential to heal. Which is fortunate. For generations, we have underestimated their ecological importance, misunderstood their vital role as habitat, viewed them more as a damp nuisance than as valuable resources unto themselves. Maybe, just maybe, by their very resilience, these environments will give us a second chance.

A good, basic plant identification guide to the Northwest's wetland plants is Fred Weinmann et al., 1984, *Wetland Plants of the Pacific Northwest*, Seattle: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. I have several things in press on the Native American management of wetlands - two of these will appear in P. Hirt and D. Goble (eds.) *Northwest Lands and Peoples: An Environmental History Anthology* and D. Deur and N.J. Turner (eds.) *Keeping it Living: Traditional Plant Cultivation and Management on the Northwest Coast*, both to be published, barring disasters, by the University of Washington Press. The South Slough National Estuarine Reserve, in Charleston, Oregon, is actively researching the effects of salt marsh restoration efforts on the Oregon coast.

All political parties die at last of swallowing their own lies.  
John Arbuthnot

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You can fool all of the people all of the time if the advertising is right and the budget is big enough. Joseph E. Levine

Salinger *continued from page 1*

they parted it was not as friends. When asked how her book was coming she said fine. We didn't press the subject. She stayed about a month and then returned to her home and children in California. Several weeks later an e-mail said she was coming back. By this time we felt that serious questions about her writing were allowed, and asked if it was possible to read parts of it. Writers often let people do that to get a different perspective on their words. Ms. Maynard said no, we couldn't read it, but she would be happy to read it to us. So that is how we ended up in a condo on the ocean listening to a 44 year old woman tell her story of the 18 year old girl who lived with one of the gods of American literature. She reads in a rapid matter of fact tone, it is not theatrical. The words are dramatic in what they are saying, not how they are said. Ms. Maynard is slim, with short dark hair, she sits in front of a computer, barefooted and intense, wrapping and unwrapping her body around the chair. Her eyes and mouth work together separately from the rest of her body and her surroundings. The words come steadily, as if by gravity, they pour out. The story is her life, but she knows the reader wants the Salinger story, and she begins her narrative by addressing the relationship. It is odd to hear her talk of Salinger as Jerry. There is so little information available about Salinger, he hasn't published in decades, he gives no interviews except to the most unlikely folks, like a high school newspaper reporter several years back. So, for any admirer of Salinger's work, this was a rare moment. As Ms. Maynard reads the image of the elusive Salinger clears a bit. He becomes more flesh. You can hear his voice, you can see the human being. That seems to be the problem for some people. Salinger has over the years with his hermit-like life built a mystery around himself. Now here is someone telling the world "who done it." Once you know how a magician performs an illusion, the magic is gone, just the craft remains. The Catcher in the Rye, Franny & Zooey, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenter and Seymour an Introduction and Nine Stories invoke in countless readers a magic voice, a uniquely American voice. Salinger's words also often bring thoughts of hopelessness, pain, depression, suicide; but still they compel the reader on, and bring him back again to re-read and re-read. It effected Mark David Chapman to such a degree that when he was sentenced to prison for the murder of John Lennon, he quoted from The Catcher in the Rye as a defense of his actions. Mr. Salinger is now in his late seventies, and has recently granted permission to a small press to print this first published work in decades; it is supposed to be printed this spring, but Amazon.com is already selling them for almost \$30 each.

As Ms. Maynard reads his voice comes out of her, "Joyce, why are you doing this?" It is a good question. The cynics will say, "It's the money, stupid," and yes, anything about Salinger is guaranteed to sell, and something so intimate will sell to the masses. The pragmatic will say, "For the record, it's history, it needs to be told." The compassionate will say, "She needs to deal with it, it

is her way of healing, bringing closure." What does Ms. Maynard say? Well, great deal. Her words seem honest, she doesn't demean or slander, she doesn't point out in grisly detail the feet of clay of this literary saint. She tells her story, and she tells it well. As Salinger noted the woman can write. Her book will soon find its place on that small shelf that holds the slim volumes that make up the little we know about one of our most famous writers, and it will cause even more controversy than it already has, by the time it gets there. But the impact it has on those who read it will never compare to the feelings it invoked on us as it tumbled out of the mouth of this fragile woman as we sat alone by the sea, and we still carry it inside somewhere. When we thought about writing this, we asked Ms. Maynard her thoughts. It seemed to pass a cloud of doubt over her features, but she said, no problem, if you get the facts right. We wrote a draft, called her and read what we had. She clarified and gave advice & criticism, and ask that we send a copy to her publisher. We said fine. Then came the question, do we publish it? And why. We had to write it, it was impossible not to. No doubt it would cause the hits to go up on our web site, any reference to Salinger will, but isn't it a bit tabloid-like for the Upper Left Edge? We were recently praised for being one of the few "Monica Free Papers" left in America. Our focus has always tried to be on other parts of the human dance. Does this story become exploitation of relationships, Ms. Maynard's intimate one with Salinger and our social one with Ms. Maynard? The one compelling thought that seems to make this a story that belongs here rather than People magazine, or the Star, is that it is about writers. Writers write, they write about passion, imagination, life, but mostly about themselves and their relationship to their world. And they share their art with the rest of their world. Just as painters paint pictures of their lovers, writers write about them, it is impossible to stop them. It is impossible for them to stop themselves. The question is: do you publish, do you share yourself with the rest of the world? Ms. Maynard's decision was yes. It's her story. All Mr. Salinger can ask is that she gets the facts right. And this is our story. We have seen with different eyes a glimpse of a writer who has had a profound effect on many people's lives including our own. We have listened to fresh words from a familiar voice. It is difficult to keep that to oneself. When a friend asks "So what ya been doing lately?" Do you say, "Not much", and let it go? When you publish a newspaper that is not an acceptable answer. So, if you are reading this we've obviously made the decision. The arguments are many, both ways, and the decision will be made by your beloved editor alone. It is written with respect and appreciation for those who write. If that doesn't count, have your lawyers call our lawyers.

This piece was written last spring and appeared last month on our website.

Ms. Maynard's book is called At Home in the World, and was published by Picador. It is available through her website which you can reach through [www.upperleftedge.com](http://www.upperleftedge.com).

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