



As careful Upper Left Edge readers* may recall, I have been teaching. Working alongside Clatsop Community College English instructor Carol Knutson, I have had the privilege to work with a small but dedicated group of local students. In the classroom and in the field, I expounded on north coast geography while Carol introduced students to our local literatures. The students have been a thoughtful bunch, good observers and critical thinkers; a cheerful band, of diverse ages and backgrounds, tolerant of bad weather and muddy paths, united in their fondness for the Oregon coast and their shared desire to explore its less traveled corners by foot and by book.

Such a jointly-taught course, combining studies of literature and geography, is a rarity. And this is hard to explain. Northwestern literature is defined by its attention to the distinctive environments and peoples of this place. And geography, in its most essential form, is the study of places. So we set out to bridge the gaps, to speak across disciplinary divides and find our points of mutual, regional reference. All of us talked and read and talked some more. We sent students out, to explore the north coast, to examine its cultural and environmental patterns and to become more sensitive observers of the landscapes around them. And we encouraged them to write.

Writing is an essential tool in the discovery of place - it sharpens our focus, and helps us to see. Writing about places requires that we tease the sensory details out of the taken-for-granted scenery. To describe well, we must first be able to see well: searching for words, writers notice patterns. And when trying to convey places on paper, they must examine their own relationship to their surroundings; is it alien; is it beautiful; is it home? And why? By asking these questions and answering with an evocative, compelling response, a good author can change the way we look at the environment in which we dwell. With a few well-crafted essays, such authors as Rachael Carson, Henry David Thoreau, and Aldo Leopold have changed our world, each by carefully examining particular places and our relationships to these places. By all means, I encourage Upper Left Edge readers to write! Whether it is to sharpen your view or to convince us all of the need for change, writing is a vital exercise.

And in this spirit, we challenged students to produce an evocative written record of their observations of the north coast, in a style and voice entirely of their choosing. I am pleased to say that they succeeded. And I thought that Upper Left Edge readers might like to try a sample. What I present below is a very small portion of that evocative record, written by two of our students. The first three poems are by Hilary Simila; two give us a glimpse of scenes from a north coast autumn, while the other describes her return home from distant travels. Her images are highly selective, creating impressionistic sensory patchworks, providing just enough detail to draw the reader into some very familiar terrain. The final piece, more political in nature, is written by a local author who wishes to remain anonymous. This piece does not seek to conceal the personal roots of the author's political convictions, but instead, explores and revels in them. There were many other writings worthy of inclusion here, but these few selections might give you some hint of how writing can allow us to see, to reflect on, and to explore our local landscapes.

Smelling Autumn

You sit alert and sound
edges curling towards the ground.
The cool fall brings
your back reaching
for the sun.
Golden lights streaming
from above
Heavenly colors
of red and brown.
Your brittle veins
no longer hold life.
Crisped and withered
with the passing of time.
You smell of cool
Autumn days.
Walking above your
golden crown
crunch crunch
beneath my feet
you sigh
Sinking into the
earth's damp bed.

- Hilary Simila (c)1998



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9. "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth."

10. "It began with Christopher Columbus, who gave the people the name Indians."

Blackberry Warriors

Machete in hand we go
running into battle,
Black rubber boots
slip, squish through the swamp
juicy morsels wait in
hesitation for our return.
Knowing their barrier will
be destroyed.
Their swords scrape, poke
the flesh, fresh blood
Purple stained fingers
dreaming about
blackberry pie!

- Hilary Simila (c)1998

Coming Home

Stretching far with arms unseen
grassy knolls,
no mountains or rivers
to discourse my thoughts.
Where do these lines of power take us?
Through voices we speak of common knowledge
though minds can't express what they know
without knowing the words
to voice it.
Rambling on, going far with the breeze
of the wind and the silence of the desert lizard,
leaving tracks as words and old skin behind
Rolling hills bring me home today.
Stretching horizons of knowledge
unseen.

- Hilary Simila (c)1998

How extraordinary it is to live in this region of the Pacific Northwest, enclosed by forest on one side and ocean on the other. Each morning I take advantage of my access to the natural world, as I hike what is referred to by some as "Gainor's Trail," which leads one through swampy skunk cabbage wetlands and old growth Hemlock and Sitka Spruce into Ecola State Park. This gorgeous walk through the forest comes to an end as it meets the ocean on Crescent Beach, and I depart the enchanted forest and enter the world of the rocky shoreline. I am deeply moved and inspired by both environments. However as I have come to know the forest more intimately over the past several years, I have become more closely connected to the forest than the ocean.

These ancient, abundantly rich woods provide shelter for the body and soul. They have become my sanctuary where I find a sense of peace, transcending from this reality into a higher spiritual realm. The forest ecosystem is the most sacred place that I know, and I am deeply concerned that, not too far in the future, there will be hardly any ancient ecosystems left, because they all will have been replaced by tree farms and clear cuts. The ancient forests that will remain will be in state and national parks. They will serve as a reminder of how things were, and still could be, if humanity had only had a different relationship with the forest ecosystem. Timothy Egan, in his book *The Good Rain*, reminds us of what happened to much of the Olympic forest in Washington as a result of unconscientious logging practices. He writes, "Something which has lived longer than most of Western Civilization was wiped out in a few years."

Unfortunately, this is the reality for all but one to five percent of old growth forests on the North American continent, depending on the data source one is relying on. Regardless of the exact percentage left, we must come to the inevitable conclusion that too much old-growth has already been lost. The American peoples can not afford to lose any more of these precious national jewels, nor can we continue to allow the destruction of the complex and unique forest ecosystems that characterize our great Northwest! On the ballot this November there was a measure to ban all clearcutting as well as to ban all use of pesticides and herbicides in Oregon forests. Whether or not one agreed with the measure in its totality, this measure did create political space for some extremely important dialogue with regard to the relationship that we, as a society, have with the forest ecosystems in Oregon.

In my opinion, banning clearcutting is the only responsible choice in the matter. Unfortunately both environmentalists and timber companies always present the issue of clearcutting in black and white terms. You are either for or against clearcutting and there is no in-between. Yet the practice of logging is multifaceted, and a ban on clearcutting does not necessarily equal job losses for loggers. More accurately and precisely, it means a cut in the high profit margin that timber companies have unfairly enjoyed for decades as a result of destroying entire forest ecosystems. This is the reality that gets lost in political debates and it is simply wrong.

The trees of the forest should not be looked upon as only a resource to be exploited and controlled for humanity's selfish purposes. Rather, the trees should be regarded as living beings, which are part of an irreplaceable part of a magical kingdom of plant and animal life. The great Sequoia, Spruce, and Hemlock; these are the saints of the forest for me. Mono-cropped tree farms, half-heartedly replanted with little concern for rebuilding a complete ecosystem (if this is even possible) are an insult to the wondrous and diverse ecosystems that existed before the forest was destroyed. Maybe it is true that Oregon will never run out of trees, but we are on the fast track to turning Oregon's once amazing and diverse ecosystems into tree farms. We must rethink how we relate to the trees and the forest before it is entirely too late.

* (those few readers, like yourself, who read the fine print)

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In the spirit of the new year I am reprinting an article that I put together last year on non toxic cleaning products. I continue to have people ask me to send them copies of these recipes so for one last time here they are.

* OVEN CLEANER: Commercial oven cleaning products work well but the fumes are not my idea of making my house feel fresh and clean. A method I use to avoid cleaning the oven is to catch spills quickly before they get cooked onto the oven surface for too long. In a cold oven place a small bowl of ammonia on the top rack and a bowl of boiling water on the bottom rack. Close door overnight. In the morning wipe out the bottom of oven with a wet soapy sponge.

OVEN SPILLS: Pour salt onto spill and let it sit for 5 minutes. Then wipe up with damp sponge or rag.

MILDEW STAINS: rub gently with a lemon cut in half. If the stains will not come off make a paste by mixing 2 cups baking soda and 1/2 cup water. Using a sponge wipe away mildew with the paste. To remove mildew from grout apply paste with a toothbrush and gently scrub. How do you keep your plastic SHOWER CURTAINS mildew free? Soak them in salt water before hanging them up. I know this sounds bizarre but it does work.

WATER SPOTS: remove by rubbing gently with rubbing alcohol. Another method is to rub gently with white toothpaste.

CLOGGED DRAINS: Mix equal parts baking soda, salt and vinegar. Pour down drain, let sit for 15 minutes. (It will foam) Flush drain with a pan of boiling water.

COFFEE & TEA STAINS: Mix baking soda and water to form a paste and rub onto stains.

TUB & SINK STAINS: Mix cream of tartar into a cup of hydrogen peroxide until it forms a paste. Gently rub stains away. If this doesn't work apply paste, cover with damp cloth and leave overnight. Then wipe clean.

BURNT PANS: Sprinkle baking soda over the bottom of the pan. Add just enough water to cover soda. Let sit for 2-3 hours and wipe clean.

ALUMINUM PANS: Fill pot with water and add baking soda (ratio 1 quart water to 1/2 c. soda). Boil 5 minutes. When I do this I add more soda as my pans tend to get really dingy.

MUSTY PLASTIC CONTAINERS: Refresh them by pouring a teaspoon of vanilla onto a sponge and wiping container. Then wash with soap and water. Another method is to crush up newspaper and place in container. Put cover on and leave overnight. Then wash with soap and water. This also works in garbage cans.

GREASE CUTTER: Add a tablespoon of vinegar to the soapy water and it will help cut grease. Works well on appliances, dishes and counters.

CAN OPENERS: Many of us forget that hand or electric can openers often get food splashed on them which can create a germ breeding surface. Clean routinely with hot soapy water and 1 Tablespoon vinegar.

ARTIFICIAL SILK & DRIED FLOWERS: Place in a bag filled 1/2 way with salt and shake. Trust me it really works.

SMALL NECKED VASES & GLASS VESSELS: Fill with water and add a denture cleaning tablet. Let sit for 20 minutes and rinse with clean water.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Rub with a piece of bread. I have never tried this but a friend of mine who owns a photography store does it routinely!

COUNTER STAINS: Pour club soda onto stain. let sit a few minutes then wipe clean. If stain is still there try soaking a paper towel in hydrogen peroxide and laying it over the stain. Place a heavy frying pan over the towel and let it sit for an hour. Wipe clean.

The important thing to remember when trying to cut down on the toxic products and aerosol cans we use is that there are many simple remedies that work just as well. Most of the above listed "recipes" are ones our grandmothers used effectively. Products do not have to be made commercially to be effective.

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12. "It was love at first sight."

UPPER LEFT EDGE JANUARY

5