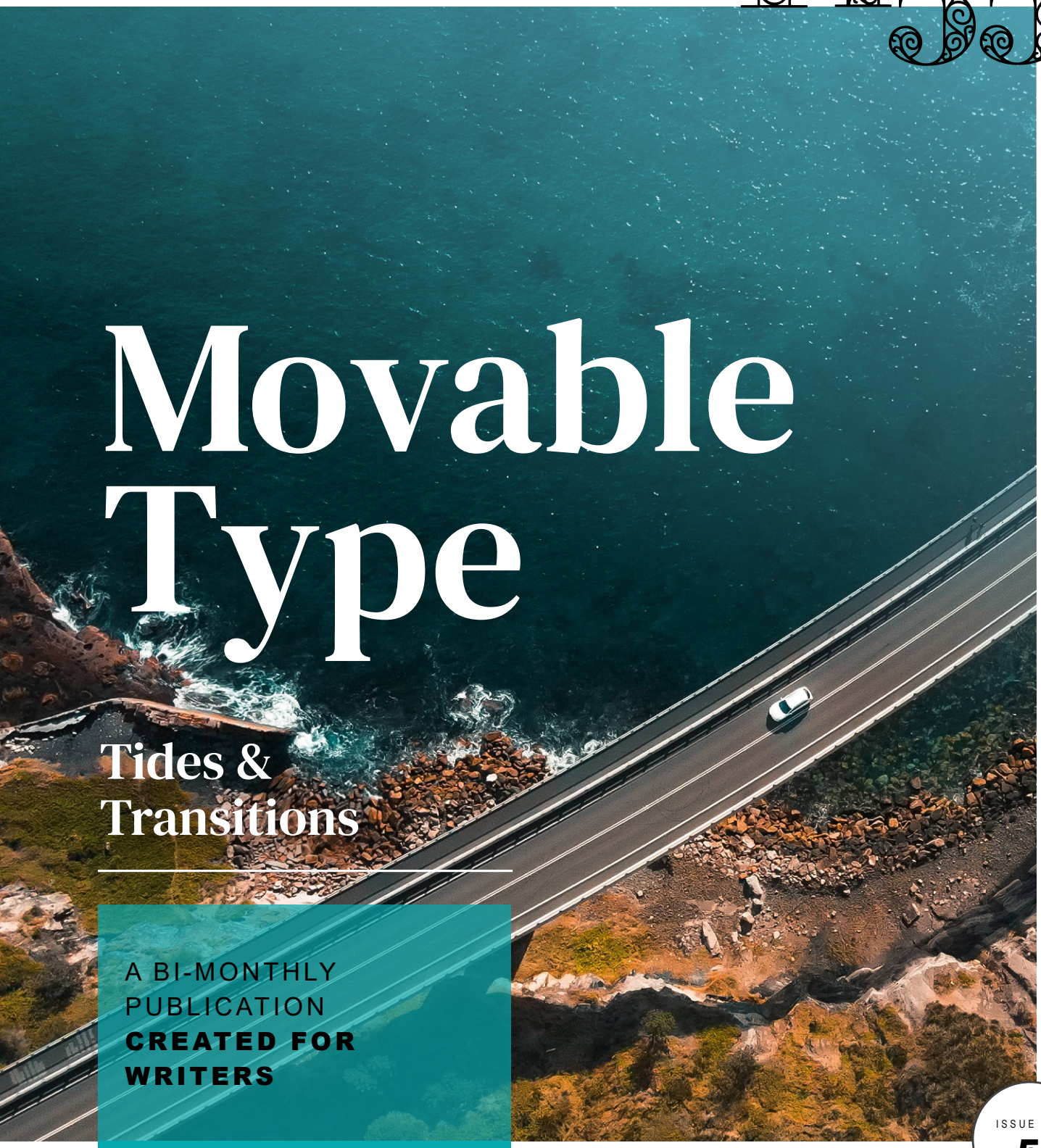
MAY
2021

1455



Movable Type

Tides & Transitions

A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION **CREATED FOR WRITERS**

ISSUE NO.
5

Contents

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

When we began kicking around possible themes for the fifth issue of *Movable Type,* we all had transition on our minds. Winter seemed to have made its last stand (though in D.C., you never know) and the warmer weather portended the return of vitality and, with more people getting vaccinated, a good reason to be out and about. It's also been a heavy year, filled with disruption, adjustment, and a growing sense that we won't be returning to what we consider normal. As with any type of change, it's complicated, but there's reason for optimism: trying new things means moving on from things that wanted improvement. As writers know, revision is everything, and a final draft seems forever like Ahab's white whale: elusive, an illusion, tantalizingly out of reach.

We started to circle around the idea of coastlines, real and imagined. The tides are all about transition; what happens on the shore signifies both ecological and emotional matters. For those worried about the world and what we're doing to it, the waters get quite deep very quickly. Looking back at what will be documented as an extraordinary year in human history, it's hard to know exactly how to feel. We've celebrated sacrifice and innovation; we've also suffered through incompetence that staggers the imagination, and defiance of civility (not to mention reality) that might drive one to despair. The loss of life, on a global scale, has been intolerable. Nevertheless, we persisted.

This issue of *Movable Type* is, by design, a series of explorations that range from serene beaches to unquiet minds. It's an investigation of our place in history, the state of our planet, and why, no matter what happens, those left behind must bear witness and carry on. Our Featured Writer is Dara McAnulty, and we're honored to showcase an excerpt from his memoir Diary of a Young Naturalist (Winner of the Wainwright Prize), which combines a passion for nature and a commitment to activism and awareness. Melissa Scholes Young takes us to Hannibal, Missouri, and her essay "Flood Stage" examines some of what's lost and all that might return when water overruns the land. Jessi Lewis acclaims the Outer Banks, and throughout "Promise on the Tide" we appreciate why she loves Avon, North Carolina, and how she's already preparing—however resignedly—for its inexorable destruction. To be in a locale and worry if it will be there for future generations is no longer the stuff of science fiction or political debate, it's the not-so-brave new world we're bestowing to our children's children. In the piece "Just a Normal Freak," Sarah P. Weeldreyer interrogates normalcy, isolation, and the journeys (literal, figurative) her panic attacks have taken her on, and how she's learned to navigate an occasionally unfamiliar world in her own authentic way. For a fitting and elegiac finale for this issue, Beth Ann Fennelly, poet laureate of Mississippi, lovingly tells the story of her mother-in-law, who epitomized a kindness and a service to others that seems sadly quaint in a culture where we're too often the center of so many stories we're always telling (to and about) ourselves.

Immersed in this writing, I found myself at times informed, infuriated, and inspired, which seems just about right. I also kept recalling the legend of King Canute and his imperious attempt to repel the tides. In simpler times, this allegory spoke succinctly and indelibly to man's hubris, as well as our impermanence. Today, the perverse synergy of our action and inaction (all we do, all we're not doing)—driven by greed, abetted by denial—suggests a profound disconnect between the world we imagine and the one we're busy creating, in our image. Once again, we must find the words that lead to action, cognizant that both change and hope begin inside our minds and hearts.

Be well and stay safe!

Sean Murphy
Executive Director, *1455*

Excerpt From

Diary of a Young Naturalist

Dara McAnulty

I find the tail end of winter frustrating, and all this waiting to travel through a portal into colour and warmth brings out my worst characteristic: impatience!

Today, though, the heat of the air and the hum and buzz all around allay my restlessness. At last, spring seems to be escaping the retreating shadows of winter.

This morning we're all off to one of our favourite places: Big Dog Forest, a sitka plantation close to the Irish border, about thirty minutes from home, high in the hills, with pockets of willow, alder, larch and bushes of bilberry in midsummer. Its two sandstone mounds – Little Dog and Big Dog – are said to be the result of a spell cast on Bran and Sceolan, the giant hounds of the legendary Fionn Mac Cumhaill, the hunter-warrior and last leader of the mythical Fianna people. While out hunting, so the story goes, Fionn's two dogs picked up the scent of the evil witch Mallacht, and gave chase. The witch fled and changed herself into a deer to stay ahead, but the hounds still snapped closer, so Mallacht cast a powerful spell that turned the dogs, little dog and big dog, into the two hills we see here today.

I love how these names tell stories about the land, and how telling these stories keeps the past alive.

Equally, I'm fascinated by the scientific explanations that geologists blast this myth with: the sandstone of the hills is more robust than the surrounding limestone, and as this wore away through glacial erosion, it was the sandstone that remained, towering above the fallen rubble of the Ice Age.

I spy coltsfoot, bursts of sunshine from the disturbed ground. White-tailed bumblebees drink and collect hungrily. Dandelions and their allies in the daisy (or Asteraceae) family are often the first pollinating plants to flower in spring, and are incredibly important for biodiversity. I implore everyone I meet to leave a wild patch in their garden for these plants – it doesn't cost much and anybody can do it. As nature is pushed to the fringes of our built-up world, it's the small pockets of wild resistance that can help.

Sometimes, ideas and words feel trapped in my chest – even if they are heard and read, will anything change?

This thought hurts me, and joins the other thoughts that are always skirmishing in my brain, battling away at the enjoyment of a moment.

The click-clacking of a stonechat brings me back to where I should be, in the forest, and I watch as the bird seems to drop tiny gravel fragments onto the path. I gaze down as the light passes over the path and realise nothing is motionless. Even a stone pathway can move and change with the light and the silhouettes of birds in flight. Each moment is a picture that will never be identically repeated. I watch, captivated, not worried by what onlookers might think, as we usually have this place to ourselves. I can be myself here. I can lie down and stare at the ground, if I choose to. And while I'm staring, inevitably, a creature passes by the tip of my nose: a woodlouse this time, ambling from nowhere to somewhere. I offer it my fingertip and it tickles my skin. I love the feeling of holding a creature in my hand. It's not even the connection I feel, but the curiosity it quenches. As you look closely, the moment sucks you in – again and again it's a perfect moment. All other noise disappears from the space around you. I move to the grass and gently lower my finger to the blades: the woodlouse disappears in the undergrowth.

Bláthnaid and Lorcan rush ahead to the brow of the hill which drops down to Lough Nabrickboy, while Dad, Mum and I amble, chatting about replacing sitka with native trees in this special place. Last year, at almost this exact time, we reached the top of the hill and saw the magnificent sight of four whooper swans – the only true wild swans. These gentle, melancholic figures bobbed gracefully on the pool, necks held high. They could have been The Children of Lir: Aodh, Fionnuala, Fiachra and Conn, cursed by their cruel stepmother Aoife to spend three hundred years on Lough Derravaragh, three hundred years on the Sea of Moyle and three hundred years on the Isle of Inishglora.

Slowly and quietly we approached the willow-shaded picnic table beside the lake, and they stayed with us as we sat in silent reverence and awe. We felt so privileged. My heart beat faster, my breath felt trapped in my chest. The birds sailed along nonchalantly, until suddenly the honking and trumpeting began. I moved to take a closer look, shielded by the bare branches of a willow tree. I sat as still as the air, watching the widening ripples made by the birds' readying for flight: wings extended, heads dipped, their legs rotating ferociously as they rose up, ungainly webbed paddles giving them forward thrust and lift-off. Away they went, bugling, like a royal convoy. They disappeared to the north-west, perhaps towards Iceland.

To even hope for a repeat of this encounter would be unheard of, and looking down across the lake, I can see there are no whoopers today. It's empty. I feel a little melancholy as we make our way down to the picnic table. I find a spot and wait for the hen harriers, transfixed until the light fades. When it's time to go my parents exchange knowing looks – and of course they're right, because I'm morose for the rest of the day, and when we get home I slink off into my room, to write, to mope. No whooper swans today. No hen harriers.

Saturday, 31 March

In late-afternoon light, with wind rising from the sea, we sail on the ferry the few miles from Ballycastle on the north-east coast to Rathlin Island. Guillemots and gulls scrabble the air with screeching and cackling. My excitement is intense.

Today is my birthday, and this morning I lay awake in bed for hours before the actual birth time (11.20am) listening to a screeching fox in the distance. All week I've 24 been like this, intensely excited, nervous, for reasons I may never truly understand. Perhaps it's because I love new places and hate new places all at once. The smells, the sounds. Things that nobody else notices. The people, too. And the right and wrong of

things. Small things, like how we'd line up for the ferry, or what was expected of me on Rathlin when we arrived. Though I always do the usual mop-up operation in my mind after any journey, look back and usually think how ludicrous it all was, still the anxiety floods in. Mum assures me that our time on Rathlin will be spent either outside or alone with the family. 'It'll all be okay,' she says.

Eider ducks congregate at the harbour on our arrival, and as we head out to the cottage that we'll be staying in for a few days, my usual dislike of new surroundings softens. This place has something special. It feels so calm here. The air is fresh, the landscape extra-worldly in its abundance. Lapwing circle to our right, a buzzard to our left. The windows are rolled down and the sound circulates through our limbs, stiff from the three-hour drive and ferry ride. We relax and radiate as hares abound and geese honk above. The car climbs above sea level towards the west of the island.

When we reach our roosting place, it looks perfect in the distance: traditional stone with no other dwellings around for miles, and on arrival I jump out to walk and explore. I soon discover a lake with tufted duck and greylag geese. As I walk, hares seem to keep popping up everywhere and my eyes struggle to keep up with all the movement, my brain whirring with all the senses.

I can hear the cries of seabirds in the distance. Gannets fly on the horizon, the squeak of kittiwakes becomes louder. I stand and look out to sea and watch the waves gently swirling, and in the dusk sky a skein of white-fronted geese fly in dagger formation. Although we've just arrived and 25 have a few days here, I start wondering how empty I'll feel when it's time to leave. I feel panic.

My childhood, although wonderful, is still confined. I'm not free.

Daily life is all busy roads and lots of people. Schedules, expectations, stress. Yes, there is unfettered joy, too, but right now, standing in an extraordinary and beautiful place, so full of life, there is this terrible angst rising in my chest. I walk back to the cottage in a trance, watching shadows moving in golden fields.

After dinner, song bursts from every corner of the sky and we stop to listen in the twilight. Isolating each and every melody, I feel suddenly rooted. Skylark spirals. Blackbird harmonies. Bubbling meadow pipits. The winnowing wings of snipe. And always the sound of seabirds. We are in the other world. No cars. No people. Just wildlife and the magnificence of nature.

It's the best birthday.

A full moon beams from behind clouds as we watch Venus above the distant houses, and I stand there with numb hands and a numb nose but a bursting heart. This is the kind of place I can be happy in. I wrap my coat tightly around my chest, inhaling it all in, not wanting to go to bed, storing the moment up with all the other memories I keep cached. When I'm ambushed by the anxiety army, when it comes stomping back, I'll be ready to fight, armed with the wild cries of Rathlin Island. ■

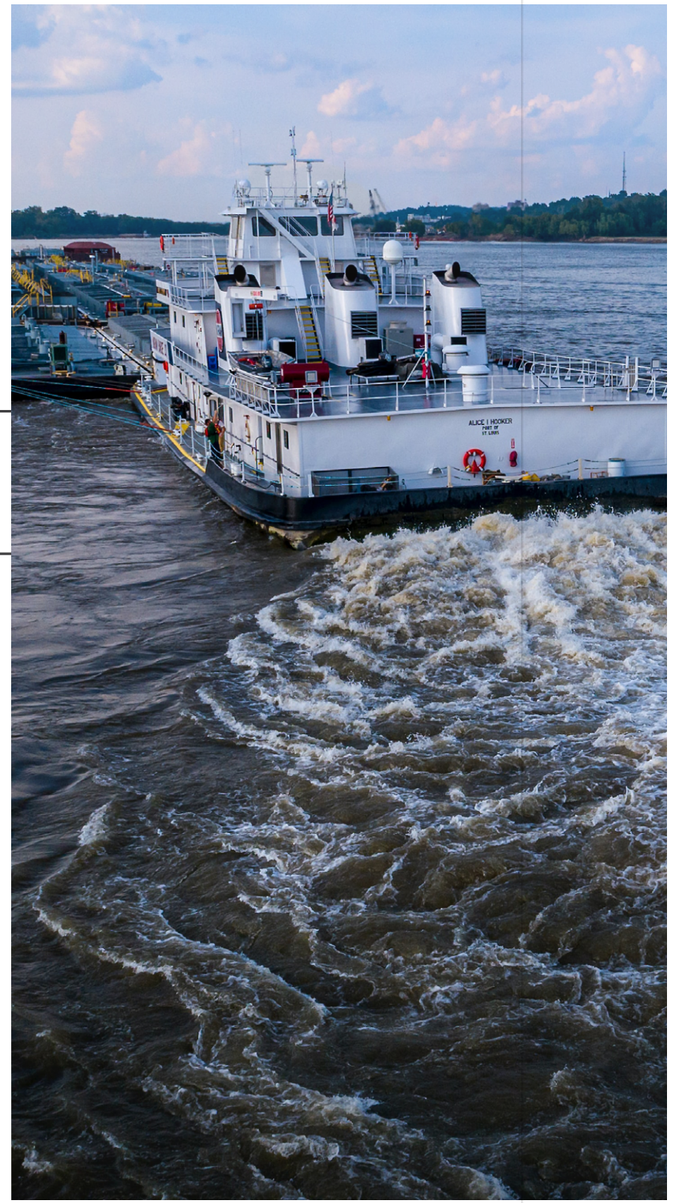
Dara McAnulty *is the author of Diary of a Young Naturalist, forthcoming June 2021. Dara's love for nature, his activism, and his honesty about autism have earned him a huge social media following from across the world, and many accolades. In 2019, he became a Young Ambassador for the Jane Goodall Institute and became the youngest-ever recipient of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Medal for conservation. He lives in County Down, Northern Ireland.*

daramcanulty.com

Flood Stage

Melissa Scholes Young

Hannibal, Missouri: When the Mississippi River reached an historic 500-year crest in the summer of 1993, my boyfriend taught me to dig a ditch with his daddy's backhoe. I was seventeen years old. Our town's flood stage was sixteen feet.



A flood stage is a water level when the water's surface has risen too much. The river needs to take more land to live.

The river rose to 31.8 feet.

I climbed up to the rusted rebuilt digger he used to run his one-man excavation business and reached beneath the seat to move forward and reach the pedals. "Use second gear on muddy banks," he said, adjusting the gear shift I straddled. "Never third." His hand remained on my thigh. "Pull back to lower the bucket." I held on with both hands and learned the worn off numbers by touch. "Listen, Missy," he said, "don't forget to engage the stabilizers." I imagined running to his sturdy arms while the dozer rolled down the bank without us.

Downtown Hannibal, which boasts Mark Twain's Boyhood Home, was spared in 1993. Our town had made the controversial decision to permanently block our river view, the very thing Samuel Clemens (whose nom de plume was Mark Twain, derived from the rivermen's call signifying a depth of two fathoms) loved best, with unsightly cement flood walls. Those walls saved our tourism livelihood, but the water ruined low-lying areas and six hundred miles left unprotected by expensive gates.

When folks in town needed more sandbags to pile outside their foundations, we formed an assembly line at the Salvation Army. I learned to shovel sand into the burlap bag until it was half full. Tie twice. Leave enough room for the bag to settle among its siblings on the levee. You can stop daylight if your sandbags are tight enough.

When there was nothing left to do but wait for someone else's levee to bust to relieve the pressure on our own, we took flood walks. We posed for pictures in front of billboards that advertised Twain's most famous characters. A sixty-foot fishing Tom Sawyer was almost drowned in the rising river. We stood next to a statue of Mark Twain at Riverview Park while the angry Mississippi churned over our shoulders. "You know it ran backwards once?" my

boyfriend said. We both stood on a rock wall, trying to locate landmarks we'd known our whole lives now submerged. "In 1812. Earthquakes from the New Madrid Fault."

"How long did the river run backwards?" I asked, following his lead to the parking lot.

"Just a few hours. Not long." He opened his truck's passenger door for me. Then he climbed in the driver seat, blasted the air conditioning, and adjusted the cool vents in my direction.

As he drove, I checked his glove box for scissors in case we were carried away by water and needed to cut ourselves out of seat belts.

That summer, the rain kept coming. Winter snows melted; spring precipitation broke records. All the water had to go somewhere. The Mississippi was hungry, selfish, and mighty. It didn't care how much we loved it. It was determined to do whatever it wanted.

In August, I packed to leave. The water began to recede but the damage was plenty.

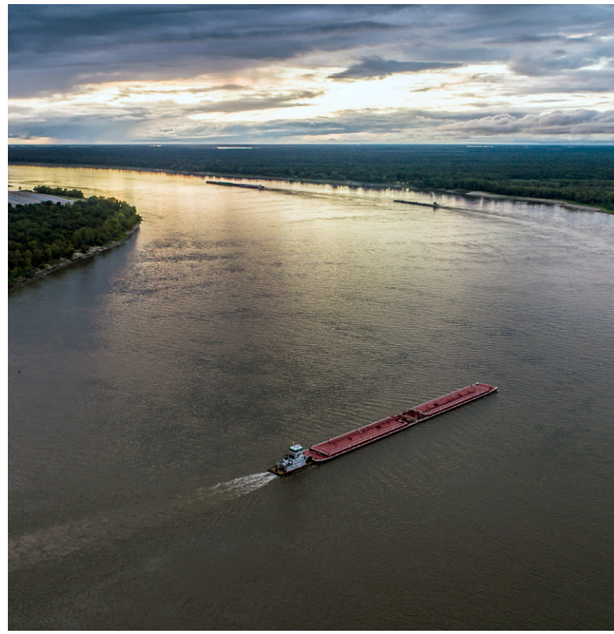
I'd earned a scholarship and would be the first in my family to graduate from college. I wanted to be known somewhere else, to see the way things worked when they weren't predetermined, to light out for the territory, as Twain had taught me. Watching the water wasn't changing its direction.

During orientation, the college clinic insisted I get a tetanus shot because I'd spent so much of the summer in the Mississippi River. I'd mentioned rusty nails and had deep cuts on my legs from barbed wire. My mom made the twelve-hour drive around flood waters because I was underage and couldn't sign my own paperwork. I worried I might still smell of rotting catfish and my classmates from Chicago might know my whole story before I could even tell it.

I've moved more than a dozen times since that summer. I check flood stages when I travel.

Like the river, I can't stay still.

Watching calm water makes me itch. The ditches, levees, and sandbags fail. A flood ruins crops and lives but it leaves behind fertile soil, if you can wait long enough to replant. Otherwise, your roots remain exposed. ■



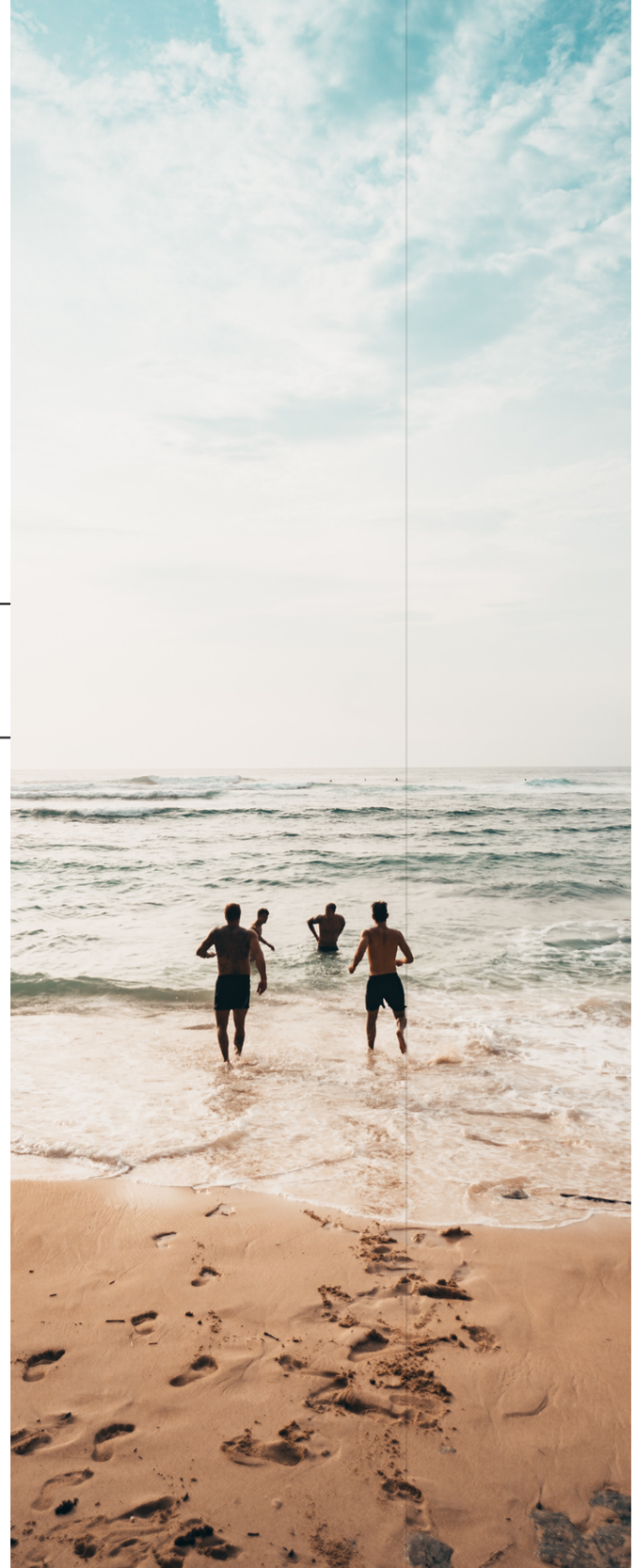
Melissa Scholes Young *is the author of the novels The Hive and Flood, and editor of Grace in Darkness and Furious Gravity, two anthologies of new writing by D.C. women writers. She is a contributing editor at Fiction Writers Review, and her work has appeared in the Atlantic, Washington Post, Poets & Writers, loughshares, Literary Hub and elsewhere. She has been the recipient of the Bread Loaf Bakeless Camargo Foundation Residency Fellowship and the Center for Mark Twain Studies' Quarry Farm Fellowship. Born and raised in Hannibal, Missouri, she is currently an associate professor in Literature at American University.*

melissascholesyoung.com

Promise on The Tide

Jessi Lewis

The best part is when you wake before the rest of your party—maybe you're up because of that damn sunburn sending prickles along your skin, or just have a dry tongue from salt and a little dehydration.



Either way, the edge of the water is there even when the people aren't. If you can walk to the water at six-thirty in the morning, it's worth it. Sand is cool at this time, the only time it feels untouched. Under a sunrise, the water is a blued glass that seems to belong to a church. And, if you're there without the wind dragging on the sand, the air presses on you with salt and hydration at once. You might come across a jogger with a Labrador or someone searching for shells with that intense I-brought-my-shell-bag dedication. Of course, you can ignore all of this and just be you on a coastal edge.

I want every visitor to experience this feeling: self-awareness at the island's end.

I've been visiting the Outer Banks of North Carolina as a tourist since age ten—that was back when putting your feet in the tide and having the ground sucked out from under your arches didn't have a foreboding feel to it.

What's odd about this place is that it will be gone. We don't think about locations and geography in terms of disappearance, and even the study of geology is usually based on a much greater timeframe. For the Outer Banks, rising sea water and changes in sand formations are shifting the landscape, putting a tourism industry at risk, homes at risk, and, of course, people too. Now climate change has an unavoidable presence, literally taking the land with its patterns of harsher hurricanes and rising tides. The beach had an erosion issue before as a shifting barrier island dependent on that sandy wind to rebuild dunes. This disagrees with infrastructure development, which, obviously, requires the land to stay in one place and the protective dunes to be consistent. With a rising ocean and increasingly vicious storms in addition, it's no longer possible for this community to comb the sand and just keep the summer crowds happy.

At the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, the land is, at some places, almost as narrow as Rt. 12 itself. Here the horizons of dune and water merge. There's even beauty in this heartbreaking vulnerability. The highway seems fated to crack apart. It's the primary way in and

out, the main route for tourists to access the area from the North.

Each summer season, the road is in a different scenario of destruction and construction.

In September 2020, Hurricane Teddy, which never actually landed on the East Coast of the U.S, brought in a surge of tide. Images of Rt. 12 showed blacktop disappearing under foam, cars caught by surprise and water rolling across parking lots. This wasn't a direct hit from a storm; there was no evacuation, but high tide flooding arrived nonetheless. Imagine what a large hurricane with a direct hit could do.

Meanwhile, this place is still so striking. The evenings bruise the horizon. Ghost crabs emerge at night. Dolphins have a regular presence and are often visible moving past, their pods as otherworldly families eating on schools of fish.

There was a summer evening when trapped water after a high tide caught a population of dinoflagellates—creatures that emit tiny pinpoints of light. Their bioluminescence burst along our footsteps in the dark.

Though, I've also witnessed the pieces of houses washing up on shore like the remains of pirate ships. Large houses too close to the water are often relocated farther from the tide, or they sometimes collapse into the surf instead. Hunks of support beam can resemble horseshoe crabs in wet sand. Pipes can stick up dangerously near beach towels. One year, there was a displaced septic tank tossed like an oversized shell in the sand.

While we've watched this disassembling over years, the tourist season hasn't really changed much. Each summer, over a million tourists swell the Outer Banks' population relentlessly. We've sat through traffic jams in order to sit in sand under a broiling sun. This includes me. I was

that kid who was dragged by the water, back scraped raw from shells, who then trudged back into the waves. And now, I'm preparing to take my daughter on her first beach trip.

It is cruel, in some ways, for your own psyche, to love a place that is going to be gone.

We have a remarkable mental block when it comes to climate change: we look for solutions with quick and satisfying outcomes. But, that's not how this works. We are too late. My baby may go to this beach community and have her feet in the sand with mine, but if she has a kid, they probably won't see this place.

The house we rented in Waves is closer to the water now. The one we used to rent in Rodanthe is now a sponge, with water stains along the wallpaper, electrical cut out of the walls and a lower-level garage featuring waterlines from hurricanes. We watched one year when a tropical depression rolled through, and the high tide slowly topped off a chlorinated pool with salt water. It was Hurricane Irene that had us first wondering if we wouldn't be able to return once the skies won. That year, a strip of land and highway near Rodanthe were

simply gone with the waves and hastily replaced with a temporary metal bridge.

It doesn't matter how often sand is brought in, the road is reconstructed, or bridges are built to span over great stretches of water. We are incapable. In Avon, according to The New York Times, home owners are looking at a tax increase of fifty percent in order to maintain the beach and road. This is stubborn survival, but it's also futile. It is possible to try to build around the unavoidable and even "nourish" the beach with replacement sand, but businesses and people will be, inevitably, displaced.

There was once a restaurant at the end of the pier in Rodanthe that's long gone. Now the pier regularly threatens to wobble off of its supports with each powerful hurricane. If it happens, I will mourn the

landmark. The family who owns the pier will mourn too, as well as the regular fishermen who visit far more often than I can. Right now, the most important reaction to climate change is that act of mourning so that perhaps, in our grief, we'll act by donating to protect the people, hospitals and schools who remain there, or by supporting politicians who are active on climate issues, or even by helping nonprofits caring for communities in the path of increasingly vicious storms.

Instead of mourning, though, our only reaction seems to be hesitation when making rental plans.

We look at images after late summer storms to spy the damage on our yearly rental spot and watch the news during hurricane season for imminent threats to our favorite place. We change plans in order to visit neighborhoods less devastated. Such disconnect from emotion is a strange privilege and a folly because it isn't just the beach that's affected. Oceanic rise signifies the promise of the climate influencing other places, economies, landmarks, employment and food availability. It just so happens that the coast's destruction is one of the first and most recognizable effects. So, the destruction of the Outer Banks is a call to reality for visitors. If tourists can realize the future of this barrier island, then perhaps next they'll notice changes in their daily, inland lives too: ongoing drought conditions, or the viciousness of hurricanes inland as well, encroaching disease spread by mosquitoes who appreciate the increase of warm humidity, or unpredictable freezes influencing crops.

To recognize shifts now is to give credence to an alarm we've been ignoring.

While such a paradigm shift comes with sorrow, it also allows you to understand your place in this world. The sky is a sharper blue, the wind a more obvious presence. I find myself paying more attention to my surroundings and recognizing when weather patterns do not fit the expectations of my childhood. I am more capable in my consciousness.

In 2019, The Washington Post questioned whether or not the Outer Banks should even continue to rebuild in fifty years. Everything in the Outer Banks is about to change. In other words, when you get yourself up early, walk out to the beach, and focus on the breath of Atlantic on your skin, a portion of the sand below your toes will be actively disappearing along with a portion of the world you know as well. It's better to recognize this, to feel it: there is a promise on the tide.■

Jessi Lewis *grew up on a blueberry farm in rural Virginia and writes about the mountains, family, and environmental change, along with hints of mythology and magic. Her essays, short stories and poems have been published or are forthcoming in Oxford American, Carve, Sonora Review, The Pinch, Yemassee, and Appalachian Heritage, among others. Jessi's novel manuscript, She Spoke Wire, was a finalist for the PEN/ Bellwether Prize for Socially Engaged Fiction. Oxford American chose her short story, "False Morels," as the 2018 Debut Fiction Winner. Her short story, "Daria's Knives" received an honorable mention in Best American Short Stories, 2020.*

jessilewis.com

Just a Normal Freak

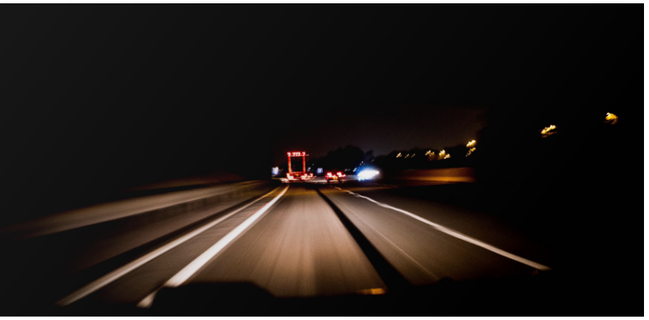
Sarah P. Weeldreyer

Back in 1985, Cher and a bunch of other people were in a movie called "Mask," based on the true story of a boy, Rocky Dennis, who was born with a cranial and facial deformity. You might be thinking, "Wait, wasn't Julia Roberts in that movie?"

Nope, Julia was in the millennial version called "Wonder," but your confusion is understandable. "Mask" is the story of a boy and his mom, both misfits, making their way through the world. I was a teenager when I saw this movie, so it's been a while, but there's one scene that has stayed with me: Rocky, a high school student, is at a carnival with his friends where among other amusements, they take turns looking into a funhouse mirror and laughing at their distorted faces. When it's Rocky's turn to look, he can't pull himself away from the reflection because the face staring back at him is "normal."

Lots of talk about normal these days. People miss the life of the Before Times and are eager for a return to normal that feels as inevitable as one more Zoom meeting. We flattened the curve; we have vaccines; we have new people in charge. Thus, we shall step through the wardrobe into the promise of a mystical, Narnia-like place called "The New Normal" where we will romp through the forest with naked faces and sterilized breath. I say, "Let the romping begin." People have lost loved ones, suffered sickness, lost their jobs, and felt trapped and alone. Everyone needs a break. According to new research by the Pew Research Center, "about a fifth of U.S. adults are experiencing high levels of psychological distress." Children are also suffering a disturbing rise in depression and anxiety.

But the hopeful promise of a new normal rings hollow when you were never well-adapted to the old world that everyone misses, never moved through it easily. What if you count backwards from one hundred during every ride in an elevator or underground train? What if driving to the bottom of a deep, corkscrew parking garage feels like a one-way trip to the earth's molten center where you are sure to find Adolf and Eva saving the last space just for you? Our "normal"



world feels to me like an Olympic luge race, and I'm always looking for the brake. The navigation app on my phone insists, "There's a faster route possible," but no mention of a place to stop and gather my wits.

Along with about one percent of the U.S. population, I have agoraphobia, and I don't need a contagious virus to make me nervous.

For an introverted agoraphobe (with a kind and employed husband), being told to stay home feels like Dorothy with her red slippers. For someone like me, not worrying about where I'm going, when I have to be there, how I'm going to get there, and where am I going to park is exquisite freedom. The way of life brought on by this tragic pandemic has been for me like Rocky's funhouse mirror – a glimpse of what it would feel like to be normal.

I had my first panic attack behind the wheel of a car when I was 21.

I had just graduated from college and begun to move through the world on my own rather than as part of a group of friends. At the time, I didn't know the name for what was happening to me. Out of nowhere, my heartrate increased, then I couldn't get a full breath, and then I was overcome by the sensation of being outside of myself, sort of floating above, which led me to think I might lose control of the car. It felt a lot like the time when I was a kid, and I was flipped out of a canoe into a fast-moving river. I remember reaching over my head and grabbing onto a low-hanging tree branch only to find my skinny arms no match for the current – a force that peeled my bathing suit down to my waist. In my memory, the terror of being swallowed by the river is matched only by the shame of being pulled out of the water half-naked by my dad and brothers. I was probably in the water for less than two minutes, but that feeling of being ill-equipped to manage my environment pressed into my brain like a handprint on wet cement.

Like my swim in that river, a run-of-the-mill, factory-direct panic attack lasts for only a minute or two, but it makes an impression – it's your amygdala saying, "Hey, my settings are off, which is not great news for you."

After a few more of those episodes while driving, I figured I was just as well adapted to survival on a zippy highway as I was in a frothing river, so I started taking the longer, slower routes. It's been almost 30 years since my first panic attack, and I can't drive alone on busy, urban highways at all. I'm not saying that I prefer not to, or that I would rather take the scenic route. I mean I can't do it in the same way a sane, moral person can't kill someone. My fear of highway driving is such that if I'm on an unfamiliar road, and I see one of those bright green signs with its jaunty little shield in patriotic red, white and blue, my fight-or-flight responder perks up, and my palms get clammy. Just the thought of accidently turning onto a highway, and I'm back in the river again flailing and panting and reaching for the branch with my useless, skinny arms.

So, what's the big deal, right? Don't take the highway. Well, yes, but the thing is because you are so afraid of the highway, unfamiliar routes start to feel threatening because what if you take a wrong turn or get lost. In a 2014 article in The Atlantic, Lenika Cruz described the onset of her agoraphobia like this:

"What if I go to the store and faint in front of everyone? What if I get food poisoning at the restaurant? What if I can't escape? What if I go insane and die?"

The first big fear, whatever it is, tends to be as fertile as a kudzu vine, spawning and spreading other fears and before you know it, you've "what if-ed" yourself into a radius of comfort from which you are loath to depart.

Then there's the worst part – the shame. Now that I'm older and care less about what others think, I make my own way logistically and in all facets of my life. However, when I was a spry lioness in my pantsuit showing the pride what I was made of, this hidden defect of mine was like Queen Elizabeth's undergarments – unmentionable. If my job, my family, or my social life made demands that were beyond the safety of my force field, I would fret and worry and tell nary a soul.

A panic attack itself is not what changes your life; not what makes you feel different, alone, and less than normal. It's the measures you will take, the extremes you will go to, often in silence, to avoid having a panic attack. I've

declined a friend's request to take her and her children to the airport when she really needed a ride. I've missed opportunities to take meals to new mothers and families with a sick parent only because of where they lived. The shame that goes along with this kind of avoidance is what makes you make feel like an oddball, a misfit, a freak. And you do your avoiding, planning, and excuse-making with your hands folded calmly in your lap and a smile on your face, so you blend in with the normal people who just casually get in their cars and go. In the words of country singer, Miranda Lambert, you "hide your crazy and act like a lady."

It's exhausting. So, you can see why this sliver of life that we're in right now, between the Before and After Times, hasn't been so bad for me. It has been a respite from ducking and hurdling the obstacles out there that only I and others like me can see.

Cars and highways are accepted symbols of freedom in our culture ("Get Your Kicks on Route 66"), but to me a highway is a trap. When you see roadblocks where others see runways, what does normal look and feel like? I'll tell you where I found it. My husband is in the Navy, and because the giant ships are parked on the edges of the continent, we've lived on both coasts. Norfolk, Virginia is connected to the mainland by a 3.5-mile tunnel that runs under Hampton Roads Harbor. Coronado, California is connected by a two-mile bridge that soars high enough above San Diego Bay for warships to sail underneath it. I arrived at these places as a young mother with no local family, only the newest of friends and a husband who was gone most of the time. That tunnel and that bridge were like my own personal Coronavirus.

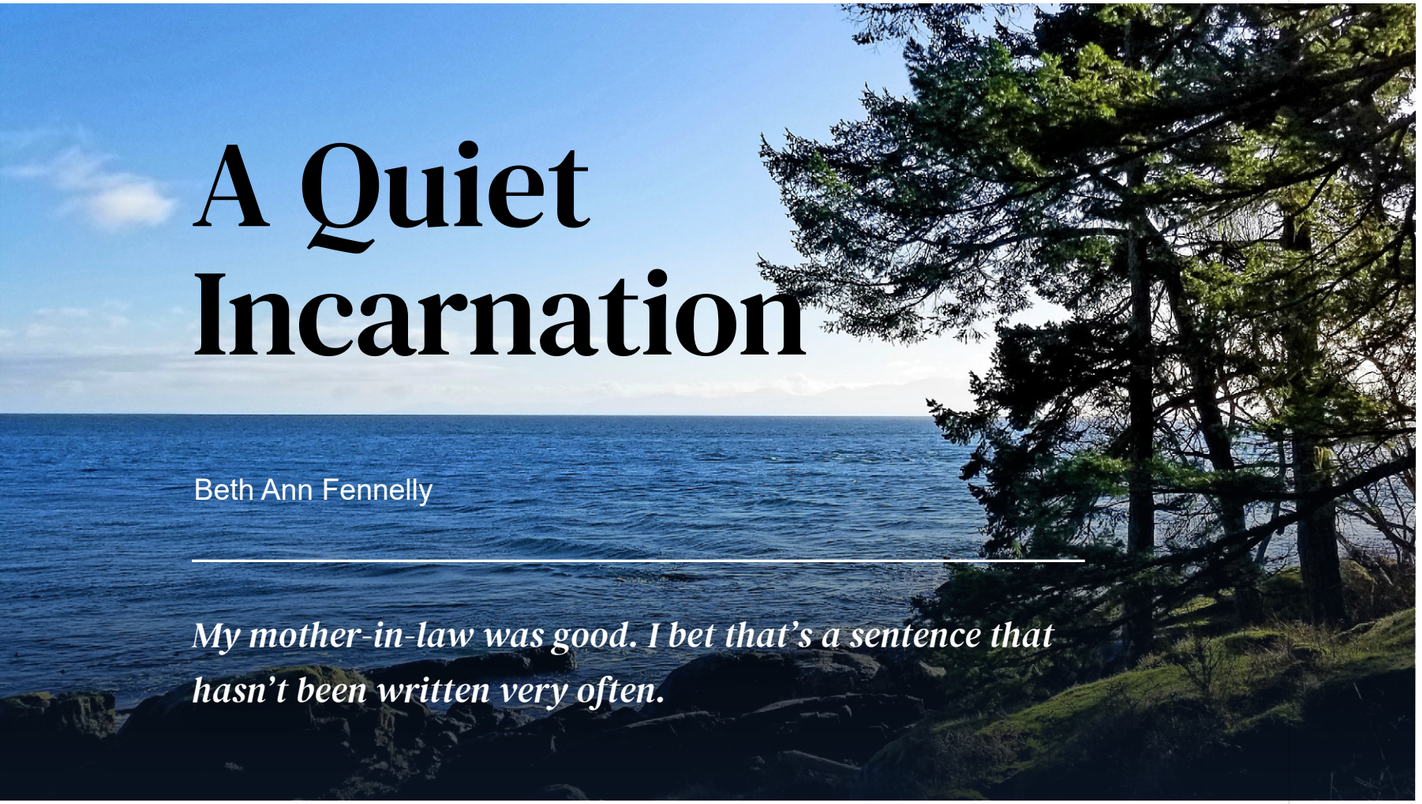
There is only one vaccine for that kind of fear and loneliness – words. In another great movie that was first a great book about loneliness, fear, what's real and what's not, Yann Martel writes in Life of Pi:

"[Fear] . . . nestles in your memory like a gangrene: it seeks to rot everything, even the words with which to speak of it. So you must fight hard to express it. You must fight hard to shine the light of words upon it. Because if you don't, if your fear becomes a wordless darkness that you avoid, perhaps even manage to forget, you open yourself to further attacks of fear because you never truly fought the opponent who defeated you."

Back in 2004, when I finally told a co-worker that I was afraid to drive through the Hampton Roads tunnel, and she replied, "Really? Me too!", well, that was like looking into Rocky's funhouse mirror. To not be alone - to be a freak, but not the only freak - that was like seeing the face of God.■

Sarah P. Weeldreyer *a lifelong admirer and student of the written English language. earned her bachelor's degree in English Literature from Newcomb College, Tulane University in 1994. She has honed her writing and editing skills in both professional and personal endeavors, writing newspaper features, gubernatorial speeches, and more. Recently, her essays have appeared in The Atlantic, Washington Monthly, and the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, the newspaper of record in her home state. Sarah is a proud military wife and mother of two teenaged sons, who inspire much of her writing.*

Follow Sarah @SarahWeeldreyer



A Quiet Incarnation

Beth Ann Fennelly

My mother-in-law was good. I bet that's a sentence that hasn't been written very often.

Betty Franklin was the kind of good one's tempted to call saintly. But we shouldn't call a good person a saint because that strips away her humanity — and responsibility for her actions. I'd wager she came out inclined toward goodness, but she was also good because she worked at it.

I'd known her for 20 years before I perceived that. Once, when the hall bathroom was occupied, I went into the one attached to her bedroom. There, on the mirror, was a Post-it note. "It's not about YOU," she admonished herself.

I've never seen a person less likely to think anything was about her, ever. She hated being the center of attention.

In our early days of dating, Tommy and I drove to Alabama to take her out to lunch for her birthday, and I whispered news of our celebration to the waitress. Behold, in a moment the staff paraded over, clapping and singing "Happy Birthday," forming a horseshoe around the table, presenting her with a fat slice of cake topped with a candle, cheering while she blew it out. It was the single cruelest thing I could have done to her. When I look back now, I'm amazed I didn't know that.

She lived the quietest life imaginable. She liked to read the Bible in the early morning with her husband, holding hands. She liked to have dinner waiting for him when he came home from his mechanic shop. Her main activities were church and service work, bringing meals to elderly folks who couldn't get out or ferrying them to their doctor appointments. Otherwise, she liked to be at home, where she managed the church's prayer chain, and managed to stay incredibly busy helping everyone who needed her. A homebody? Hoo boy. She lived an hour and a half from the Gulf of Mexico but never went to the beach. The one time she was on an airplane was to fly to Chicago for our wedding. Did she hate it? She didn't complain. But she went the rest of her life without duplicating the experience. How hard she must have prayed to keep that plane aloft, borne on eagle's wings.

Her pleasures were simple; her greatest was being of use. Six of her 11 grandchildren lived next door and two others close by (the remaining three, our own, were a six-hour drive away, an almost unthinkable distance for her, though the Franklins did make the drive twice).

"Can I fix you something?" she'd ask when a small body flew though her back door. Even in her late 70s, her own body failing, she'd ask that, ratcheting her La-Z-Boy recliner up and using the remote to change her Hallmark movie to Blue's Clues. She felt most herself when serving others invisibly, without praise. She hated to be photographed, was embarrassed by gifts, distrusted compliments, dreaded clothes shopping, avoided all things fussy or expensive. She played the piano — when she was alone in the house. Her "beauty regimen" consisted of washing her face with Pond's cold cream. I never saw her drink a drop of alcohol. Married at age 18, she never had a job outside the home, never earned a single dollar. I never heard her ask for anything besides photos of her grandchildren. I never once heard her express a wish for anything advertised on television or mentioned by a neighbor.

Maybe I'm so fascinated with Betty's goodness because we're opposites in every way but the most important one — loving her son.

Tommy grew up in Dickinson, Alabama— a corner store and a cluster of houses surrounded by piney woods. His asthma was so bad when he was a boy that he couldn't

sleep at night. He had to sit up in bed because lying down made the wheezing worse. Betty sat in a chair beside his bed every night, talking with him, sometimes reading him stories so he wouldn't feel scared when the breaths were difficult to snatch into his lungs. So he wouldn't be alone with the owl-punctured dark.

Tommy tells me they'd talk for hours, until finally Betty would say, "Hear that?" and he'd listen, and there it was, the log truck rumbling down the road. The log trucks started right before dawn, so this was always a welcome rumble, the signal that soon Tommy would be able to breathe. She'd kiss his forehead and he'd slide down a bit in bed and she'd say, "You can sleep now, Sugar. You can sleep," and she'd return to her bed for her own few short hours of slumber.

The world my husband grew up in could have embittered him. People treated like outcasts do grow bitter. Tommy didn't want to hunt like the other boys, and he had no talent for fixing cars like his brother and father. What he wanted to do was draw cartoons and write books. Betty encouraged him, even as he moved out into a world that frightened her. He was the first person in his family to go to college. And then grad school, where we met, and where he started writing books.

A few years ago, one of his novels, Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter, was chosen as the Abitur for the south of Germany — the text on which German high school students studying English must write their exams. I tagged along on his reading tour. The most surreal moment was in the famed lecture hall at the University of Heidelberg, where I stood in the back, admiring its grand proportions, its arched ceiling, its dark walnut walls covered by oil paintings and lit by sconces. This university, I'd read, one of the world's oldest, was chartered by Pope Urban VI in 1386, and has produced famous philosophers, writers, scientists, 29 Nobel laureates. Now it held a rapt, standing room only crowd listening to a first-generation college graduate from a hamlet in Alabama read his story about his people. And I so swooned for Betty, whose

pride would have equaled my own, that — though it sounds melodramatic — I had to steady myself on the chair in front of me.

When people talk about legacies, they usually mean buildings or civic projects or financial gifts. Betty's legacy is love. Her legacy is children who experienced it purely. Her legacy is the man I wed. Her legacy is my happy marriage.

She died of complications due to the Alzheimer's that developed in her last few years, though those who knew her believe she started to die February 16, 2016, the day her husband of almost 60 years died. She took care of him from when he was in his 20s until he passed at 82, and toward the end, when his health was in decline, his body failing part by part, that caregiving became full time. When he was gone, she lost her job.

I never heard her complain until the end of her life, when Alzheimer's started damaging her neural circuitry like rats nibbling the wiring in a house, invisible, insidious, the lights in her beautiful mind going out one by one. Before the diagnosis, but after we'd noticed worrying signs, we drove to her house to take her to a neurologist. We fetched lunch from Panera for all the grandkids, and Betty put her broccoli and cheddar soup in the fridge for later.

On the drive back from the tests, we heard her murmur something. "What, Mama?" Tommy asked. "I hope those kids don't eat my soup," she said. Tommy's eyes met mine in the rearview. We didn't need the neurologist to tell us she was sick. It was the meanest thing I'd heard her say in her entire life.

I lost a friend to cancer, and I used to think that was the worst death, to retain all of your faculties yet be unable to stop the body's vicious revolt. Yet now that I've seen a death from Alzheimer's, I'm not so sure. The slow, relentless, inexorable coring of someone's personality, the deletions of memories, experiences, words, thoughts; this may in fact be worse. At the end, she couldn't always recognize her children. There was so little left of her, but goodness remained. One of the last things she said to me was, "Can I fix you anything?"

Hear that, Betty? It's the log trucks. You can sleep now, Sugar. You can sleep.

Beth Ann Fennelly, *poet laureate of Mississippi, is the author of six books, most recently Heating & Cooling: 52 Micro-Memoirs. This piece first appeared in Notre Dame Magazine (Spring 2021).*

bethannfennelly.com

EDITOR'S NOTE

If there's one thing my husband and daughters can agree on, it's that they loathe the pottery cicada I have hanging on our porch. Large and painted to closely resemble its bug-eyed real-life counterpart, the earthenware insect has a large opening at the top meant to accommodate a bunch of lavender stalks. I bought it in Provence, where cicadas are seen as a symbol of good fortune. La Cigale (the cicada), they say, was sent from God to keep people awake during their early-summer chores, when they might otherwise be tempted to lie down and nap; but the plan backfired, since they found the constant buzzing a perfect sleep aid.

Note to all of us in the DC area: Think of this year's 17-year cicada invasion as a cure for insomnia! But seriously. The Provencal cicada myth shows that most things have a good side and a bad side. When I chose this issue's theme, "Tides and Transitions" I was thinking about liminal states, coastal areas, the environment. But as contributor Melissa Scholes Young and I discussed her piece and she mentioned the cicadas in waiting (they're in the ground beneath our feet!), I thought again.

Without cicadas, trees, shrubs, and many types of crops would not receive the rich fertilization the bodies of these insects provide. They play a role in the ecosystems where they appear, and without them, those systems might falter.

Which led me to much sadder thoughts, about one of my favorite ecosystems, the sharp elbow of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where for two decades my family enjoyed the gorgeous beach at Coast Guard Light Station in Chatham. At the point of the beach the waters of Nantucket Sound meet the Atlantic Ocean, the crosscurrents making an ideal habitat for seals and sea birds. We would walk at sunset from the bathing area down to that pointy section and watch the seals gather.

As the years went by, fewer seals gathered – because more sharks circled. During one evening's swim, my husband anxiously beckoned me to return to shore because several people had found an actual baby shark, injured, flopping on the sand. More years passed. Coast Guard buggies dotted a beach once filled with towels, chairs, and umbrellas.

The last time we were able to visit, the beach was closed. It was 2017. No one was allowed to skip down the old wooden steps and kick off their sandals before going for a stroll, let alone take a dip. But the Coast Guard station and its light still patrolled the shoreline. We could still look down and see the "elbow," imagine the life taking place at its edge.

A few weeks ago my husband sent me an article from the Cape Cod Times. So much erosion had happened so quickly on Morris Island that the National Weather Service's Upper Air Observation Station launched its last balloon, after 60 years of service. The bluff on which the station was situated is losing one to two feet per week on average, and sometimes storms erode six feet at once.

For some people life is measured out in coffee spoons (pace T. S. Eliot). For others, in the rates of melting glaciers, or fracking acreage. For me, life is measured in the spaces between cicada awakenings – 17 years, a genuine environmental good – and in the erosion of sands on a cape jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean – weekly loss, a true sign of environmental change.

No matter how we measure our lives, though, we live forever on the shoreline: Between bravery and cowardice, growth and decay, life and death. I hope this issue's contributions help you as you consider where you're standing, where you might travel, when to step in to uncharted waters.

All the best,

Bethanne Patrick
Editorial Director, *Movable Type*

What's new for 1455®

1455's 3rd Annual Summer Festival will feature a variety of international artists and thinkers, including those listed below. 1455 is continuing to accept proposals for authors, speakers and contributors, from a variety of genders, cultures, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds. Learn more at 1455litarts.org/summerfest

Calling all teen poets!

1455's 3rd Annual Teen Poetry Contest is awarding a $5,000 Grand Prize to the best poem submission. We expect it will be a difficult decision to narrow down one winner. To celebrate the variety of poetry submitted by talented teens, the next issue of *Movable Type* will feature a collection of our favorite submissions. Learn more about the Teen Poetry contest and how to submit a poem here: https://bit.ly/34jCs0x

Subscribe to *Movable Type* and other 1455 emails on our website: 1455litarts.org/movable-type

facebook.com/1455litarts @1455LitArts @1455LitArts https://bit.ly/2GEzNWM

DESIGNED BY morgan ryan morganryancreative.com

Featuring imagery sourced from unsplash.com, pexels.com and pixabay.com