

## Foreword

I have spent the last thirty summers within Cape Cod National Seashore, a mile's walk on a sandy one-lane road, past freshwater ponds, to the ocean. Cape Cod is a fragile, shifting, glacier-made place. Three feet a year of beach, on average, are swept away. From the air, the 365 kettle ponds the glacier left resemble puddles, and Cape Cod itself, a slender, curling spit, the glacier's thin drool. Due to the foresight and effort of a grassroots movement to make it into a national park, signed into law by President Kennedy in 1961, the outer Cape is pristine. So I am instructed daily each summer in the value of conservation. It's from this place that I am writing.

The theme for this issue, "Our Fragile Environment," includes an array of responses to it. The black executive in "Vertical Integration" explains how he ended up imprisoned for violating labor laws, with a neo-Nazi murderer as his cellmate. Through this cynical, unreliable narrator—whose bottom line is the bottom line—author Stephen Truman Sugg spins a tale that's a tour de force in indicting and integrating societal, political, personal, and corporate ills.

In the marvelous essay "All Our Relations," Jeanine Pfeiffer argues for the Native American worldview that we are all related, citing DNA and examples of how "Non-human creatures enhance our lives...", including predators, enumerating the domino effect when two such creatures are removed from an ecosystem. In her poem "Thing," Felicia Zamora reminds us that "You wombed first in the deep."

Ben Goldfarb's story "The Run" depicts what happens to a man in an Alaskan village, dependent on salmon, when the salmon run out. In Rhonda Browning White's heartbreaking "A Big Empty," a West Virginian and his pregnant wife try to flee their home, where they've witnessed mountaintops lopped off by machines at "two-hundred-forty tons a bite, two bites a minute," endured his father's death and her previous miscarriage. "The land retaliates for the harm we do it," the wife says, and the husband wonders if the reverse can also be true.

In "From Utah to the Promised Land" by Mark Rigney, a rancher and his wife suffer respiratory diseases. Their farm suffers

drought. Her son calls from Israel with startling news of their soil. How long can you last, the hired hand asks.

In Ginger Eager's "Beyond the Boundaries of Flesh," a post-partum doula in an expatriate community in Thailand coaches a mother and her newborn to breastfeed, yearns to keep her teenaged daughter safe from the sexual threats surrounding her, and while fleeing the impending disaster from the plant where her husband works, believes "We can love one another beyond our fate."

In contrast, a prominent, aging doctor voices all the reasons why he should keep swimming to oblivion, in "Due West" by Glenn Vanstrum. He cites his "unbearable disgrace" professionally and catalogues the ills that will extinguish the world he has inhabited and the ocean he has surfed all his life. Then appears "The Magnificent Purr" by Keya Mitra, a wild spoof on spas, pets, alternative health care, and the human inclination both to blame and worship.

Some stories convey the power of our surroundings as background to our lives. The grandchild of Mexican immigrants living near the border narrates Yvette Benavides' story "Attachments." William Kelley Woolfitt's gorgeous "Spotted Dog" suffuses us into village life in Uganda, where a dog threatens the village, and an orphaned boy who is considered bad luck discovers that luck can change. Steven Swiryn's "The Unicycle" depicts the emotional environment of an enduring marriage, in all its ordinary, splendid temporality.

The poems address weather extremes, in "You Will Feel a Pinch" by Marylen Grigas, the impossibility of hearing oneself think, in "The Audible World" by Nicholas Samaras, but also wry humor in Hal Sirowitz's "High on the Food Chain": Smokey the Bear is "...to the forest what Santa Claus is to Christmas."

A theme on the environment was proposed some years ago at an editorial meeting. The threat to it is our greatest global health issue, we nominally concurred. But it was not until Hurricane Sandy devastated New York and our hospitals that everyone readily agreed to the theme. I am reminded of Ben Franklin's warning: "Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom."

Suzanne McConnell  
*Fiction Editor*