

CLIMATE RIFTS | HAVENS FROM HEAT | LAND, LOCKED UP

High Country News

For people who care about the West



THE MAKING OF A
DESERT SURF ROCK BAND
By Jason Asenap

NIZHÓNÍ GIRLS



The Nizhóni Girls, from left, bassist Liz Mackenzie, guitarist Becki Jones and drummer Lisa Lorenzo, in Glass Beach, near Albuquerque, New Mexico, last month. NATE LEMUEL/DARKLISTED PHOTOGRAPHY

On the cover

The Nizhóni Girls, original illustration by Weshoyot Alvitre.

Online Extra

See photographs of the Nizhóni Girls performing, and hear a recording at hcn.org



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FEATURE

12 Nizhóni Girls

The making of a desert surf rock band
Story by Jason Asenap, art by Shaun Beyale, lettering by Tristan Ahtone



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Editor's note

Rethinking our journalistic traditions

The practice we call "journalism" has deep roots in Indigenous communities. From calendars to quipus, codices to songs, record keeping and storytelling have been part of Indigenous life since time immemorial. One of the most influential and enduring forms of documentation has been the ledger drawing: a genre created in the mid-1800s by Plains artists using grease pencils and ledger books — people like Silver Horn, Mad Bull and Zotom.



Zotom was one of more than two dozen Kiowa prisoners of war imprisoned at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, in the 1870s at the end of the Red River War. During that conflict, tribes fought to stop the United States' violent, and illegal, expansion into the Great Plains. Zotom and other prisoners documented their journey to prison and their experiences in ledger drawings — a stunning piece of visual reporting that testifies to the innovative styles of storytelling and documentation of 19th century Indigenous communities. This distinctive style of reporting, which has been criminally undervalued by journalism historians, stems not from a tradition rooted in Western democracy, but rather from the desire to record events in ways that reflect a community's values, interests and priorities.

With this tradition in mind, we embraced an unusual genre this issue: the graphic novel. The story of the Nizhóni Girls is a contemporary story, one common to Indian Country though overlooked by non-Indigenous reporters. This is the story's strength: It is the record of a moment and reflects the values and priorities of one group of Native artists at one point in our collective history.

And we decided to tackle this story with the help of an all-Indigenous team. Jason Asenap (Comanche), a regular contributor to HCN (and a personal friend), is also an accomplished screenwriter. While we can't afford to produce his screenplays (yet), we can find creative and dramatic ways to bring his visions to life — in this case, the graphic novel.

Shaun Beyale (Navajo), an accomplished artist — and a former classmate of mine at the Institute of American Indian Arts — helped bring this story to life. Beyale's work typically explores the fantastical elements common to the comic book world. His project *Ayla: The Monster Slayer* is set in a post-apocalyptic Southwest where humankind is on the brink of extinction. Ayla, a Navajo superhero, must protect her people and restore balance to a land ruled by an evil force. Beyale's ability to visualize the Nizhóni Girls' story enabled him to serve, essentially, as "photographer" for this issue's feature.

From codices to calendars, from ledger drawings to graphic novels, the visual journalism we present in this issue is deeply rooted in Indigenous experiences, traditions, themes and values that explore ideas of friendship, family — and, of course, a little rock 'n' roll. We hope this story speaks to you as well.

—Tristan Ahtone, associate editor



Harbor seals gather on a spit of land at the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge near Cold Bay, Alaska, along the coast of the Bering Sea. ASH ADAMS FOR REVEAL

Why bulldoze one of the wildest places on Earth?

A proposed road through Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge threatens one of the wildest and most remote protected areas on the planet, according to an article originally published by *Reveal*. Last year, then-Interior Department Secretary Ryan Zinke, ousted in late 2018, approved the 12-mile route connecting an Aleut town to a small local airport. An Interior study had found that the project would "lead to significant degradation of irreplaceable ecological resources." Grizzly bears and caribou herds wander the rugged

landscape. In particular, the study states that the road would threaten the survival of a migratory sea goose called the Pacific black brant, as well as a number of other waterfowl species. The stated reason for the road concerns medical necessity for the remote town, but the deal includes a provision that would allow the Aleuts to transport tens of millions of dollars of seafood along the highway to be shipped to Asian markets. JANE KAY/REVEAL
Read more online: hcn.ws/alaska-refuge

“For the most part, if you stop killing marine mammals and turtles, they can recover and do quite well.”

—Andrew Trites, director of the marine mammal research unit at the University of British Columbia, speaking about the effectiveness of the Endangered Species Act. A new study by scientists from the Center for Biological Diversity found that three-quarters of the imperiled marine mammal and sea turtle populations in the study increased after listing. EMILY BENSON Read more online: hcn.ws/endangered-species

Any solution to climate change must involve the West's public lands

In an opinion article, Jamie Williams, president of The Wilderness Society, argues that progressive activists pushing the Green New Deal should include public lands in their policy prescriptions to decarbonize the U.S. economy. Emissions from public lands are the "dirty secret" of America's climate problem, he writes. Fossil fuel extraction on federally regulated lands should be significantly restricted, he said, while communities that depend on natural resource industries should be helped to transition to a new economy. He went on to excoriate President Donald Trump, former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and other politicians who reject the science of human-caused climate science and encourage fossil fuel development on public lands. JAMIE WILLIAMS

Read more online: hcn.ws/dirty-secret



Glacier National Park, where climate change has reduced the number of glaciers from 150 in 1850 to 26. MARK SMITH/CC VIA FLICKR

A toxic past and present on the Spokane River

The Spokane River and region are at a toxic crossroads. A polluted past has spurred local high school students to work toward a cleaner future, one without cancer-causing PCBs in the waterway. Meanwhile, regulators striving to clamp down on industry pollution are opposed by business interests, even as locals cannot consume the river's fish, which were once a staple. And local recycling plants find themselves stuck between a mandate to reuse materials and the potential danger to the river from local handling toxic byproducts.

This tangle has led the community to look for new ways to clean up its river, and consider both local and global solutions. Progress has been piecemeal so far, but a spirit of collaboration has made a dent in the PCB pollution that continues to degrade the region's waterway. While there is hope for a cleaner future, some also worry that a bid to loosen regulations by Washington state business interests could get the blessing of the Trump administration's EPA and endanger the progress made thus far. As the river gets cleaner, questions about how clean it can get and what role global forces and local efforts will play in its future loom large.

CARL SEGERSTROM

Read more online: hcn.ws/polluted-river

150 Approximate number of pit toilets in Joshua Tree National Park that the nonprofit group Friends of Joshua Tree has been cleaning since the government shutdown started.

\$2,000

Amount the group has spent on toilet paper, as of the first week of January.

National parks have been hit hard by the partial government shutdown, according to an article originally published in *The Guardian*. With most of the staff furloughed, parks have seen overflowing toilets and trash cans, while losing out on millions of dollars in revenue. At Joshua Tree National Park in Southern California, visitors swarmed the park, and with no park officials there to enforce the law, vandals cut down some of the famous trees that give the area its name. In an attempt to curb the chaos, a group of locals banded together to hand out maps, give directions, pick up trash and clean toilets. "If we miss a day, the toilets can get ugly quick," said John Lauretig, director of Friends of Joshua Tree, a nonprofit. In Arizona, meanwhile, the state government provided an initial \$64,000 "donation" to the federal government to keep the Grand Canyon open. Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado remains shut entirely.

GABRIELLE CANON/THE GUARDIAN

Read more online: hcn.ws/shutdown-parks

Trending

Farmers and ranchers lose support during shutdown

The partial government shutdown has denied farmers and ranchers key services provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture — even as President Donald Trump claims that farmers support his standoff with Democrats over border wall funding. Vital programs include operating loans through the Farm Service Agency that are used to purchase seed, livestock and other supplies. The agency also supplies regular reports on commodity prices. Without that data, farmers and ranchers find themselves in the dark just as they need to start making spring planting decisions. And if the shutdown runs into March, food stamps — which are distributed by the USDA — could run out for about 40 million Americans. NICK BOWLIN

You say

JANET THEW: "They voted him in, they get to face the unpleasant consequences. Maybe now they won't be so uppity about depriving others of government largesse when they are enormous beneficiaries themselves."

DEVIN DAVIS: "Many farmers didn't vote for Trump. Most did, but not all."

DIANE PAYNE: "No one should be forced to work for no pay."

Read more online: hcn.ws/farmers-ranchers and Facebook.com/highcountrynews

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circulation@hcn.org
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SUSPICIOUS SPENDING

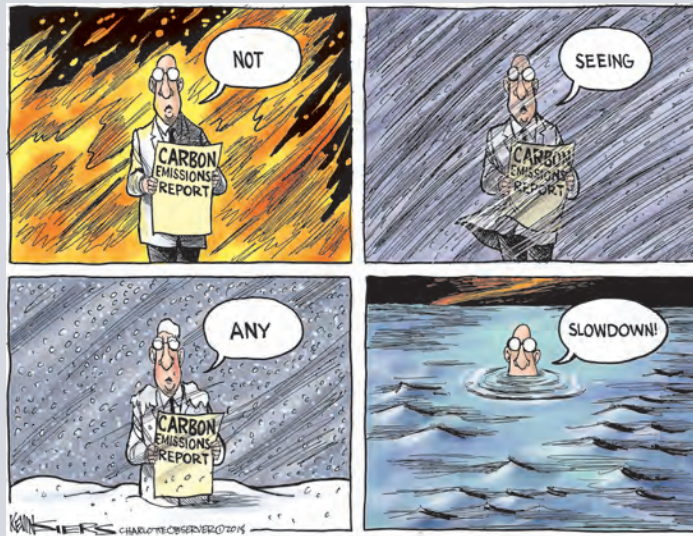
Thanks for your article on Initiative 1631 ("What Killed Washington's Carbon Tax?" *HCN*, 1/21/19). You touched with only a few sentences on the reasons for its defeat, however. Most supporters and certainly the framers of this initiative have come to realize the importance of the following in trying to pass restrictions on carbon emissions. Any fees or tax (call it whatever) will and must be passed on to the consumer of the products the emitters produce, and this must be realized and accepted by the electorate. The idea that we can just make polluters pay is unrealistic, and any knowledgeable voter will know this. Meanwhile, decisions on exactly where and how much of this money was to be spent were to be left with a non-elective and non-accountable commission. Most voters are suspicious of this type of spending. I am as "green" as anyone but voted to defeat 1631, as I thought it was poorly written. It should have been thought out better, given the experience of the past attempts and defeats of similar measures in Washington and Oregon.

Robert Pilger
Port Orchard, Washington

ANOTHER BADLY WRITTEN INITIATIVE

In my opinion, the carbon tax initiative failed because of the way it was written and the open-ended question of costs. I'm a retired senior citizen, considered low-income, and I find living here is becoming unaffordable, within 20 square miles. I read the initiative, as I don't sign or vote for anything until I read the whole thing. Nearly every initiative is badly written, and this one was no exception. It left too many openings for raising costs. It also put forth a ridiculous statement to create and support family-sustaining jobs in Washington. What bullshit is that? It was like a bait-and-switch. If you expect a carbon tax of any kind to pass, there must be a full, open account of dollars, and in this initiative, there wasn't. In fact, it appeared that no one knew exactly what the costs would be. Are you freaking kidding me?

C. Richardson
Lynnwood, Washington



TAXES VS. COMMON SENSE

I am Native, a homeowner and retiree. For me, Initiative 1631 came down to a couple of points for voting no. Foremost: yet another tax. Taxpayers in Washington are weary from all the taxes. Every time a new idea crops up in government, the taxpayer is leaned on to fund it, be it the homeless, teacher salaries or streetcars — just throw money at it. After reading the proposal front to back, I was struck by the idea that limitless tax money was going to be assigned to an unelected governing body, yet no plans were set out as to what was going to be funded. Does that make sense? I am all for smart environmental policies, but let's use some common sense.

Ricardo Rosales
Shoreline, Washington

CLIMATE CONFLATIONS

Thanks for your post-mortem on Initiative 1631. I think you missed one of the main reasons it failed. 1631's design made it as much a "social justice" initiative as a climate initiative. Talk with some of those who backed Initiative 732, including Audubon. The Sierra Club and 350.org killed 732 because it didn't meet their demands for carve-outs for the social justice movement. 1631 met those demands but was seen by most voters as a slush fund for special interests, not a climate solution. As long as the social justice folks conflate their wishes with meaningful climate action, I think we will be in gridlock.

David Engel
Del Mar, California

THE CARBON DIVIDEND ACT

"What Killed Washington's Carbon Tax?" was excellent. However, it failed to discuss the main alternative to a "carbon tax," which does, in fact, have bipartisan support on the federal level: a carbon fee and dividend proposal currently before the House and Senate. The real reason a carbon tax will always fail, as you point out, is that it is a tax. And it is a highly regressive tax that places the heaviest burden on transition to a low fossil fuel economy on the people who can least afford to bear it: the low- and middle-income consumer of fuels, transportation industry

workers, and buyers of energy-intensive products. On the other hand, the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act, H.R. 7173, imposes a fee on carbon per ton at the point of entry to the economy, whether it involves a mine, a well or a port, and increases annually until objectives are met. The funds collected are returned in equal amounts per capita to everyone with a Social Security number, thus neutralizing the impact on consumer pocketbooks, while biasing every business and private decision and the adoption of innovation technologies throughout the economy. The specifics can be reviewed at citizensclimatelobby.org.

James Ferguson
San Diego, California

PART OF THE PROBLEM

I was one of the founders of the organization that gradually morphed into Climate Solutions, but broke with them when they closed their Energy Outreach Center. Frankly, Climate Solutions was a significant part of the problem. The refusal of "big green" to support the revenue-neutral carbon tax in 2016 resulted in a large cadre of climate activists (over 1,000 volunteers) largely sitting out the Initiative 1631 campaign. I supported 1631, even though it was, in my opinion, an inferior approach. I secured a couple of useful endorsements for it, but I did not do any legwork for it. Bitter pills leave a long aftertaste.

Jim Lazar
Olympia, Washington

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Democrats divided over Green New Deal

Can newly elected progressives get party leaders to embrace a bold climate agenda?

BY MAYA L. KAPOOR

Last fall, on Nov. 13, more than 200 activists protested on Capitol Hill, demanding a Green New Deal — a massive economic stimulus package designed to create jobs, remake the U.S. energy system and fight climate change. Rep.-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., waded into their midst, vaulting the movement to national prominence. As determined young protesters in matching brown T-shirts hunkered in front of the unoccupied desk of Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., holding signs reading “Step Up or Step Aside” and “Green Jobs for All,” Ocasio-Cortez addressed them.

“I just want to let you all know how proud I am of each and every single one of you for putting yourselves and your bodies and everything on the line to save our planet, our generation and our future,” she said, as cameras rolled. Indeed, by day’s end, many protesters were arrested.

The Green New Deal is popular: According to a recent poll by Yale University and George Mason University, more than 80 percent of registered voters support the concept. But it’s also vague about details, and Democratic leaders are divided on how to respond. Even as newly elected progressives and activists push for sweeping policy change, the party’s established power brokers favor caution. How the party resolves this discord could determine whether climate change becomes a prominent issue in the 2020 elections — and what action Democrats are prepared to take on it, should their power expand.

Before taking office, Ocasio-Cortez pressed Pelosi to create a Green New

Deal select committee, which would have one year to design a job-creating solution to climate change. Ocasio-Cortez’s proposal — crafted in partnership with the Sunrise Movement and Justice Democrats, a progressive political action committee working to get corporate money out of politics — calls the transition away from fossil fuels “a historic opportunity to virtually eliminate poverty in the United States.” A Green New Deal would include job training programs in renewable energy and guaranteed employment for all Americans.

“Climate change is an urgent issue,” said Rep. Deb Haaland, D-N.M., who campaigned on getting the country to 100 percent renewable energy and was an early supporter of the Green New Deal. “We have to do something now.”

The Green New Deal’s massive scope and ambition — to wean the entire country from fossil fuels in just over a decade — comes in response to scientists’ ever more urgent warnings. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, nations must reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050, or face increasingly catastrophic consequences. Yet the politics of climate change remain fraught — even among Democrats.

Democratic House leaders firmly rejected Ocasio-Cortez’s proposal for a select committee. According to *E&E News*, the Democratic chairs of existing committees bristled at the possibility of a new select committee usurping some of their own powers. Instead, House Speaker Pelosi reinstated the defunct Climate Crisis Select Committee, which is charged with investigating and recommending climate change solutions. However, it lacks authority to craft legislation, and its members will be allowed to accept campaign donations

In the office of Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md., Benjamin Finegan expresses his anger at fossil fuel executives and politicians while asserting optimism for the future. KEN SCHLES

from the fossil fuel industry, something Ocasio-Cortez wanted to ban.

“The title is the only thing about the committee that begins to acknowledge the magnitude and urgency of the crisis we are in,” said Benjamin Finegan, an organizer with the Sunrise Movement.

University of Oregon law professor Greg Dotson, who worked on climate policy for former Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., believes the party’s internal disagreement is a symptom of the growing pains it’s experiencing as it regains power. “We are in an interesting situation where the Democratic Party agrees on the most important things, which are climate change is happening, it’s caused by humans, and we have to take action to address it,” Dotson said. “Because they’re coming out of the minority, how exactly to do that, they’re still working on.”

Although the Green New Deal select committee would have a new and specific mission, there are other ways to advance its goals. Democrats on House committees like Transportation and Energy and Environment have expertise on key climate issues and could do similar work. “Advocates should understand that there’s a tremendous amount of institutional history and expertise on all the committees,” for even the most far-reaching goals of a Green New Deal, Dotson said.

But a new generation of climate change activists, including Finegan, dismisses the idea that the existing power structure can address the climate crisis. “I think that argument is politicians being politicians,” Finegan said. After all, for decades, politicians have known climate change was happening, but they’ve done little to stop it. It’s a frustration with the old guard that some early-career Democrats, like Ocasio-Cortez and Haaland, seem to share. “We should have done something decades ago,” Haaland said.

To be clear, even if a new committee were created, Green New Deal legislation would have a snowball’s chance in Phoenix of passing the Republican-controlled Senate, never mind being signed into law by President Donald J. Trump. Still, the debate matters: “For the next two years, the most successful outcome would be for the Democratic Party to come to a view on how to address climate change and the equity issues that the Green New Deal points to,” Dotson said.

The sooner that happens, the better. Leadership has never been more needed: In 2018, after years of decline, carbon dioxide emissions again surged in the United States, even as climate change’s impacts became harder to ignore. □

THE LATEST

Backstory

Washington’s Puget Sound hosts three pods of southern resident orcas, and half a million people come to view them each year. **Their population has declined over the past two decades; in 2005, they were listed as endangered.** Biologists cite a lack of salmon, their main food source, as the main culprit, but whale-watching boats contribute by stressing the whales (“Are whale watchers taking a toll on Puget Sound’s orcas?” *HCN*, 4/17/13).

Followup

In early January, whale watchers and biologists rejoiced in the birth of a new orca calf. **If the calf survives past its first year, it will be the first to do so in the last three years.** Last summer, a female orca carried its dead calf around the sound for 17 days. Researchers hope the new arrival is a female who can add to the sound’s orca population, now at 75. Ken Balcomb, director of the Center for Whale Research, told *The Seattle Times* that the birth is “great news.”

JODI PETERSON



CENTER FOR WHALE RESEARCH

Maya Kapoor is an associate editor at *High Country News*. @kapoor_ml

Where heat hits hardest

As Tucson's efforts fall short, activists add shade to the city's south side

BY JESSICA KUTZ

On a cool morning in mid-November, about two dozen volunteers and students work in a shallow basin behind Star Academic High School, a school on Tucson, Arizona's south side, shoveling out piles of dirt and placing rocks in front of a drainage designed to capture rainwater from the school's roof. One teenage girl uses a hammer drill on the hard dirt, creating a hole big enough for a young tree, while other students spread mulch and plug native grasses into the basin.

The landscaping will beautify the school's barren lot, but the project's real goal is to add shade and natural vegetation to one of the hottest parts of this desert city. Trees and plants have a dramatic cooling effect on urban environments, and researchers say they will be critical safeguards for the health and well-being of residents as temperatures continue to climb.

Jessica Kutz is an editorial fellow for *High Country News*. [@jkutzie](#)

A few years ago, city and county officials mapped tree canopies and shade throughout Tucson. The results showed that in northern and eastern Tucson, where the city's wealthier residents live, the tree canopy is extensive. But south of 22nd Street, home to many of the city's low-income and minority residents, shade is scarce to nonexistent. And its absence shows: The south side can be up to 5 degrees hotter than the greener neighborhoods to its north.

This disparity will only worsen as the climate continues to change. The Southwest is projected to warm by as much as 8.6 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100. In Tucson, rising temperatures will be further amplified by the urban heat island, a phenomenon linked to rooftops and asphalt roads, which absorb more heat from the sun during the day than natural surfaces and then radiate it at night. The effect is particularly pronounced in the sparsely vegetated parts of the city, where people of color and low-income residents live. Those

areas are expected to heat up more quickly and be less equipped to buffer the changes with costly amenities like air conditioning. Here, extreme heat could lead to more hospital visits and even deaths.

Planting trees and using captured stormwater to irrigate them could help a lot. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in the hottest part of the day, shaded areas can be 20 to 45 degrees cooler than unshaded ones. To grow more vegetation, the city of Tucson has created programs to encourage installation of rainwater-harvesting cisterns and stormwater collection basins. But so far, the programs have disproportionately benefited the more affluent areas of the city, where they are least needed.

Over the past decade, Tucson has tried to prepare for a hotter future by promoting green infrastructure and water conservation through water-harvesting policies. The city created financial incentives, such as rebates and grants, to encourage citizens to make improvements in their own neighborhoods or backyards, capturing water or adding vegetation.

Unfortunately, there's a problem, City Councilmember Regina Romero tells me, sitting in her cramped office in the basement of the Center for Biological Diversity, where she works as the Latino engagement director. The way the incentives are structured often makes them inaccessible to the city's low-income residents. Take the city's rainwater-harvesting program: In 2012, Tucson started a rebate program that reimbursed residents up to \$2,000 for installing cisterns and other systems to collect rainwater on their properties. The hope was that people would use water collected from their roofs, instead of drinking water, to irrigate landscaping.

But few people in poor neighborhoods took advantage of the program. "(Rainwater barrels) were kind of becoming this middle-class symbol of wealth," said Andrea Gerlak, a water policy scholar with the University of Arizona. Most of the rebates went to northern Tucson, where the shade canopy was already densest. Low-income residents couldn't afford the upfront costs of installation, and in many cases, they were unaware the program even existed, Romero says. In the initial rollout phase, none of the promotional materials or workshops were available in Spanish.

Communities with fewer resources, like this south side neighborhood, are less likely to apply for grants for projects like curbside irrigation.

NORMA JEAN GARGASZ FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS





Claudio Rodriguez, a community organizer with Tierra y Libertad. NORMA JEAN GARGASZ

Since then, the city has directed funding to a local nonprofit called the Sonora Environmental Research Institute, which is distributing systems to low-income and Spanish-speaking residents with zero-interest loans and grants. Over 100 harvesting systems — about 6 percent of the systems funded by the city's incentive program — have now been installed in low-income households.

Similar access problems have arisen with a new neighborhood program, which distributes up to \$45,000 a year to each of Tucson's six wards for small stormwater harvesting projects — things like water collection basins and curb cuts, which funnel water from the street into landscaped medians or parks. Romero proposed the program to add vegetation to more heat-stressed parts of the city. But the City Council ultimately decided that any funding opportunity had to be equally available to every part of the city. "Well, we all know that equal does not mean equitable," Romero says. Out of the

20 applications received in the first year of the program, 18 were in two of the city's more affluent wards.

It wasn't that these projects weren't of interest to people living in poorer neighborhoods. It was that the process of qualifying for the funding — developing a project plan and filling out an extensive application — was harder for communities with less resources. In some of the areas Romero represents, "people work and have two to three jobs," she explained, leaving them less time to participate in civic life. Additionally, there are few neighborhood associations on the south side. That's another barrier, because most of the city's outreach about funding opportunities is funneled through these groups.

"We have to make sure we are responding to that inequity," Romero says, "and that we are spending those funds in an equitable manner."

Dressed in a school-bus-yellow T-shirt, Claudio Rodriguez watches as his

Students and nonprofit grassroots organizations construct green infrastructure at Star Academic High School.

NORMA JEAN GARGASZ

partner, Nelda Ruiz, and other community members mulch and plant trees in another stormwater basin in front of Star Academic High School. "They look like little work ants," he says, looking on from the building's shadow at 2 p.m.

Rodriguez is an organizer with Tierra y Libertad, a grassroots environmental justice organization that works on the south side. Though it's been hard to take advantage of the city's climate adaptation programs in the barrio, Rodriguez and a few partners are finding other ways to get the work done.

The stormwater basin at Star High School, for example, came about through a project called Tucson Verde Para Todos, spearheaded by Gerlak and her research partner at the University of Arizona. The group won a grant from the university and partnered with Tierra y Libertad and other local nonprofits, including the Watershed Management Group, which designed the basin, to create the project. They secured donated trees and asked university and high school students to help plan the landscaping, and the coalition gathered community input. One result of that input was the creation of a shaded bus stop in front of the school; until recently, a single metal sign marked the stop in a city that regularly tops 100 degrees in the summer.

But even when these partnerships work, Tucson and other cities can't afford to rely on them to promote climate resiliency. As Diego Martinez-Lugo, another organizer, explains, "It is kind of like a double-edged sword." For the city, projects like this are a win-win, he says: "They don't have to fund it, and the community is doing it anyways." Ultimately, this approach ends up putting a lot of responsibility on individuals to fight for projects in communities whose residents are already overworked.

As climate change intensifies, governments at every level will need to re-evaluate who is really benefiting from their programs. Federal tax credits for solar panels, for instance, don't really help low-income communities. The tax breaks make adaptation easier for people who already have the means to protect themselves, says Diana Liverman, a researcher who studies the societal impacts of climate change. "But if you aren't earning enough to pay taxes, you aren't getting the tax break."

At the grassroots level, community organizers and other groups will continue to fill the gaps and promote community resiliency in any way they can. "Because at the end of the day, everyone will be affected by climate change," Rodriguez said. "But it will hit our low-income and people of color first." □

THE LATEST

Backstory

Over the last 20 years, hundreds of thousands of homes have been built in the West's wildland-urban interface. Meanwhile, wildfires have become more frequent, more severe — and more costly, in part due to the expense of protecting those houses. Unfortunately, homeowners often ignore guidelines for decreasing fire risk. Jack Cohen of the U.S. Forest Service's FireLab in Missoula, Montana, told *HCN*, **"At this point, we need to change the perception of houses being victims of fire to one of them being fuel."** ("What the High Park wildfire can teach us about protecting homes," *HCN*, 8/8/12.)

Followup

In November's Camp Fire, which destroyed 14,000 homes in Northern California, buildings burned, but surrounding woodlands often survived. **Researchers say the pattern confirms that thinning forests doesn't reduce home loss nearly as much as fire-wise design and property maintenance.** Making wildland-urban communities resistant to ignition is crucial in preventing disasters, Cohen, now retired, told *E&E News*. The Trump administration, though, has decided to concentrate on increased logging and thinning.

JODI PETERSON



CALIFORNIA OES/CC VIA FLICKR

Shut Out

How Wyoming ended up with a third of the West's landlocked public land

BY CHRISTINE PETERSON

Elk hunters traverse a ridge in Sublette County, Wyoming, in an area where careful attention must be paid to avoid trespassing on private property next to public lands.

RYAN DORGAN

In mid-2016, a state of Wyoming website ran a notice detailing a proposed land exchange. Not many people bother to read such postings, and even fewer were likely to understand what the trade entailed on the ground.

But Buzz Hettick did, and he was alarmed: The swap would have closed off access to 4,000 acres of prime elk-hunting land in a rugged stretch of southeast Wyoming. If it went through, the cut-off land would have joined the approximately 3 million acres of public land in Wyoming that are already inaccessible to the public.

That's an area roughly one and a half times the size of Yellowstone National Park, broken into little islands that are technically public but available only to those with permission to cross the surrounding private land.

The landowner said no one used that land anyway. The state wanted to acquire property with timber or possible outfitter leases it could sell to help pay for schools. But the outdoor recreation community went berserk.

Hettick, who is a volunteer for Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, a sportsmen's advocacy group, spends hours every week chasing tips about trades where sportsmen lose access to large chunks of land. When he heard about this proposed deal, he and a couple of others began calling, emailing and reaching out via social media to the state's hunting and fishing community. They sparked a wave of angry calls and emails to the land board, along with an online petition that garnered thousands of signatures. And they were successful; the state's land board ultimately denied the trade.

Hettick said the experience reminded the local outdoor community: Pay attention, or lose public land.

Wyoming is not the only state with public land surrounded by private land, but a recent report commissioned by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership showed that it has a disproportionate amount — one-third of the landlocked acreage in the entire Western U.S. How it got that way is complex: part industrialization and homesteading, part land swaps and road closures, part climate quirk. The fight for public access is an ongoing one, led largely by dedicated outdoor enthusiasts determined to read every land trade proposal, knock on landowners' doors and petition in the halls of Congress.

"It's up to each individual outdoorsman, a hunter, angler, backpacker, hiker, mountain biker, I don't care who it is, it's up to them to let us know," Hettick said. "I'm done losing places to hunt and fish and recreate. I just am."

Wyoming's land patterns are often described as "patchwork," evoking images of a quilt carefully stitched by

a loving aunt. But spread out a map of Wyoming — with white, yellow, green and blue indicating ownership of private, federal, tribal and state land — and it looks like that loving aunt had a few too many hot toddies before she got to work.

The northwest corner is marked largely by the colors green and purple, a healthy dose of wilderness and national park and forest, and the southeast part is mostly white, indicating private land. A large orange area near the center denotes the Wind River Reservation. The rest of the state is a mix, with yellow spots showing Bureau of Land Management ownership, and blue, for state ownership.

The patchwork process began before Wyoming even existed as a state. An expanding federal government took land ceded under treaties, the terms of which were often not upheld, from the Shoshone, Arapaho, Lakota, Cheyenne and other tribal nations, and divided it into 1-square-mile sections. Then, to encourage the railroad to build, the federal government gave it every other square of land for 20 miles on either side of the Union Pacific's planned route. Railroad companies could then borrow against the private parcels to help fund construction, creating a big, curvy stretch of white and yellow patchwork in an otherwise disordered quilt.

The result was that hundreds of square miles of public land were left with no permanent public access.

The 1862 Homestead Act and others like it further complicated things by allowing settlers to claim and eventually keep relatively small tracts of land formerly governed by tribes, as long as the newcomers built a house or made other "improvements." "It was kind of a bet between you and the government that if you can stay on this piece of land for five years without starving, you can have it," said Tom Rea, a Wyoming historian and editor of wyohistory.org.

This happened across the West, but Wyoming "hit the sweet spot of just attractive enough for settlement to break up the ownership pattern, but not attractive enough to become entirely private," said Joel Webster, director of the Center for Western Lands at the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. Wyoming was wetter and thus easier to settle than places like Nevada or Utah, but not quite as arable as states like the Dakotas, where most land is private. Seventy-five years later, about half of Wyoming is privately owned, the swaths of yellow, green and blue on the map slowly fading to white.

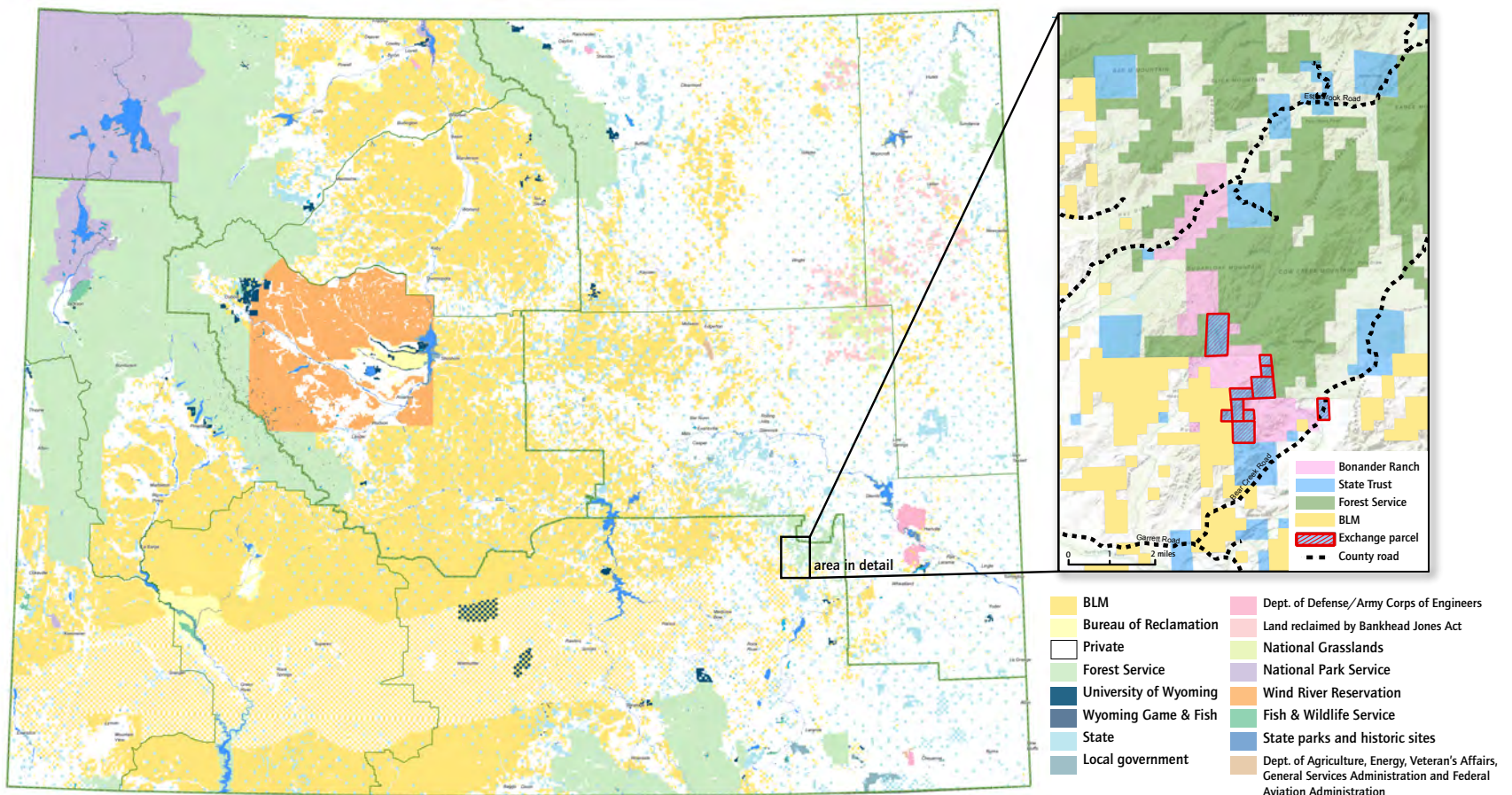
"I don't think anyone thought about how people would access it," said Wyoming Game and Fish Warden Dustin Kirsch. Those islands of inaccessible public land were seen as basically useless. For decades, users worked around the problem: A knock on the door or phone call often gave



Christine Peterson has written about outdoor recreation, land and wildlife issues for the past decade from her home in Wyoming.

Wyoming's public and private lands

Proposed 2016 land exchange



sportsmen and outdoor enthusiasts access to private ranch land. Ranching in the arid West is a tough business, though, and in the last 25 to 50 years many older family ranches have been split up or sold, said Jim Magagna, executive vice president of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association. Other ranches stayed together but leased the land to outfitters to help pay the bills. The result was the same: diminished informal access.

County road abandonments, combined with almost a century of divisive and often opaque land exchanges like the one Hettick protested in Wyoming's Laramie Range, further complicated things. Counties have rights of ways and maintain roads that snake through private and public property throughout much of the West. Often, they're the only paths connecting one piece of public land to another. But if a landowner successfully petitions the county to abandon a right of way through his or her property, the public is then locked out.

"It's a simple decision (made) by the county commissioners," said Jeff Muratore, a hunter who lives in central Wyoming. And few people pay attention to those decisions.

Hettick's first loss of access came long before he had the power to make a difference. He was 8 or 9, finally old enough to tag along on a hunt with his dad. But that same year, the landowner who controlled access to the piece of forest they hunted every year shut it down. "We were having

Thanksgiving dinner at my grandfather's house and got the phone call (saying) we wouldn't get to get through there," he said. "I was sitting at the table, just bawling."

Hettick, now 50, became a fierce fighter for public access, meticulously tracking land exchanges and road closures and playing a never-ending game of whack-a-mole.

In June, landowners in southeast Wyoming asked the Laramie County Commission to abandon two county road easements that ran through their properties. Those roads also sliced through three parcels of BLM land that offered mule deer, pronghorn and even elk hunting. Hettick once again rallied public-land users, and it was ultimately denied. Then in October, a hunter in the Cody area alerted him to another road closure being proposed in the northwest corner of the state and it started all over.

Hettick believes these fights are a battle for the legacy of Wyoming and the West — a place where people can pull off just about any dirt road and camp or hunt without paying thousands for a private lease. This access is also vital to the state's financial future, Hettick argues: Wyoming has a \$3.5 billion tourism economy — second only to energy.

So sportsmen's groups have gone beyond the on-the-ground fights. The survey commissioned by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and completed by GPS mapping company onX documented all landlocked land in 13 Western states and found about 9.5

million acres of locked-up land in the West. The Conservation Partnership is now using that information to push for legislation that provides more money to buy permanent easements or small sections that connect public parcels to existing access points, said Webster.

The state has its own program, called Access Yes, where Game and Fish pays private landowners for hunting access. But it isn't permanent, and if Game and Fish doesn't renew a contract, or the landowners change their minds, access ends. Similarly, the Rock Springs Grazing Association, which leases or owns many of the sections originally granted to the railroad, allows public access. But that, too, is at the discretion of the association, Magagna said.

A bill put forward in 2018 that would have secured funds for improving public access by permanently reauthorizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund — a \$900 million pot of money from offshore oil and gas royalties used to improve outdoor recreation — died shortly before Christmas. Lawmakers proposed a bill with similar provisions in early January.

But even if federal funds help secure public land access, Hettick said, hunters, anglers, climbers and backpackers need to continue to stay vigilant: Access can evaporate in many different ways.

"One thing people didn't understand in the past is how important the outdoor recreation economy is to the state," he said. "The world is shrinking. It's pretty much that simple." □

The land exchange would have closed off access to 4,000 acres of public land, and created even more limited access to other lands.

STATE MAP BY BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT / BONANDER EXCHANGE MAP BY WYOMING OFFICE OF STATE LANDS AND INVESTMENTS. SOURCES: ESRI, HERE, DELORME, INTERMAP, INCREMENT P CORP., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GEBCO, IGN, KADASTER NL, ORDNANCE SURVEY, ESRI JAPAN, METI, ESRI CHINA, SWISSTOPO, MAPMYINDIA, OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS AND GIS USER COMMUNITY

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A herd of 400 pronghorn in western Wyoming forms one of the longest land mammal migrations in the Lower 48. JOE RIIS

WILD MIGRATIONS, ATLAS OF WYOMING'S UNGULATES, By Matthew J. Kauffman, James E. Meacham, Hall Sawyer, Alethea Y. Steingisser, William J. Rudd and Emilene Ostlind. 208 pages, hardcover: \$50. Oregon State University Press, 2018.

The unexpected sight of a bighorn sheep from a curvy mountain road or a herd of elk emerging from the forest's shadows at dusk can give a person an illuminating glimpse into the lives of our wild fellow creatures. In *Wild Migrations: Atlas of Wyoming's Ungulates*, the reader learns how these snippets of animal encounters intersect with the bigger picture: the arduous and complex migratory journeys that many wildlife species make on their quests to mate, give birth, feed and seek shelter across the American West.

Writer Emilene Ostlind, a former *HCN* intern and editorial fellow, vividly describes animal migration, explaining how researchers track wildlife movements and the important role conservation efforts play in preserving habitat. These stories, accompanied by intriguing scientific observations, illustrations, sweeping maps and photography, take readers on their own journey into the mountains and grasslands of Wyoming, the rugged landscape many of these animals call home. JESSICA KUTZ

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Road trips and the Rusty Spur

What does it take to get the widely dispersed *High Country News* editorial team together? A 10-seater van, a ton of caffeine and an invitation to Fishtrap, a conference devoted to thinking and writing about the American West. Thirteen *HCN* staffers took part in this year's Winter Fishtrap, in Joseph, Oregon, where we joined in interesting discussions on the theme, "The Meaning of Refuge," and our writers and editors got to see each other in person for the first time in months.

Editor-in-Chief **Brian Calvert** moderated a panel of Associate Editors **Kate Schimel**, **Tristan Ahtone** and **Maya Kapoor** and Contributing Editor **Ruxandra Guidi**, who discussed the many interpretations of "refuge" and the potential dangers of a separatist state of mind. Brian also spoke, advocating for the development of poetic thinking amid environmental and ecological crises, in his first-ever PowerPoint presentation (though you'd never know it). We'd like to thank the Fishtrap organizers and members of the Wallowa Resource Center for helping us pull this off, not to mention the patrons of the Rusty Spur Bar and Grill, who made room for us at karaoke night.

Beyond crooning at the Rusty Spur, the staff has been busy, especially our assistant editors. **Emily Benson** recently spoke on a panel at the Idaho Environmental Forum's legislative forecast event, while **Paige Blankenbuehler** was accepted to the Bread Loaf Environmental Writers' Conference at Middlebury College in Ver-

mont. And we are very proud of Associate Editor **Kate Schimel**, who somehow found the time to report and write a rich piece on community-led conservation from Papua New Guinea, published by *bioGraphic* in January: "Where the Rainforest Meets the Road."

The editorial department continues to evolve, and we have a few exciting announcements. **Jessica Kutz** has extended her editorial fellowship to write pieces focused on social and environmental justice. **Carl Segerstrom**, a former editorial intern and fellow, has been named a contributing editor, based in Spokane, Washington. And **Elena Saavedra Buckley** will be moving from her editorial internship into an editorial fellowship, writing for the Tribal Affairs desk.

HCN bids a loving farewell to a longtime friend and reader, **Margaret "Peggy" Clements**, who died recently at home in Paonia, surrounded by her family and just six weeks short of her 105th birthday. She and her late husband, Ken, spent most of their lives in the West, and Peggy, a devout Catholic, had an endlessly curious, questioning mind and cared passionately about social justice and environmental issues. She was dearly loved and will be missed by everyone who knew her.

We have a correction for our last issue (*HCN*, 1/21/19). In "Sportsmen flex their political muscles," we said that camping is banned on Wyoming's state parks; actually, it is banned on state lands.

—Elena Saavedra Buckley,
for the staff



Most of *HCN*'s editorial staff piled out of a clown car into Joseph, Oregon. ELENA SAAVEDRA BUCKLEY/HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

NIZHÓNÍ GIRLS

THE MAKING OF A
DESERT SURF ROCK BAND

STORY BY: JASON ASENAP
ART BY: SHAUN BEYALE
LETTERING BY: TRISTAN AHTONE
COVER ART BY: WESHOYOT ALVITRE

MEET LIZ MACKENZIE...



BASSIST AND LEAD SINGER OF NIZHÓNÍ GIRLS.

"NIZHÓNÍ" MEANS BEAUTIFUL
IN THE NAVAJO LANGUAGE.



LIZ, LISA AND BECKI ARE INSPIRED BY
THE FEMALE POP PUNK BANDS THAT
THRIVED BETWEEN 2010 AND 2014.

BANDS LIKE LA LUZ...



L.A. WITCH...



... AND BEST COAST.



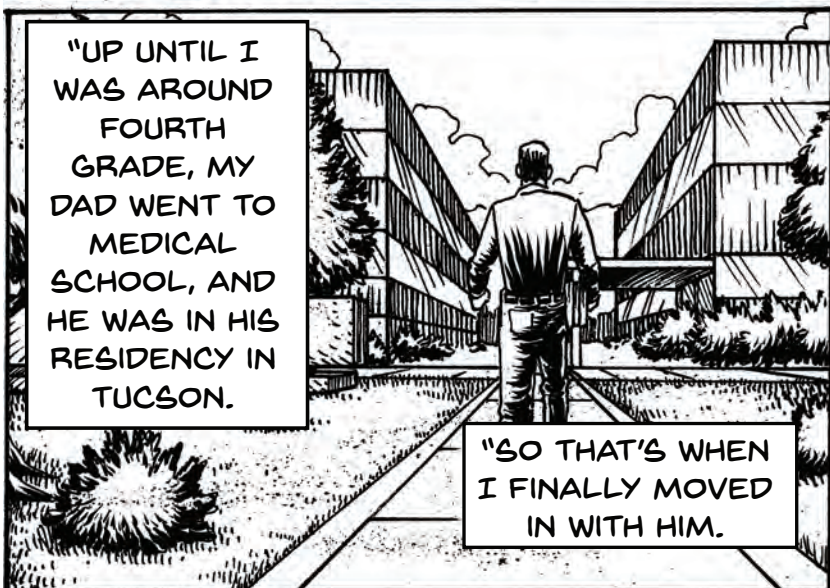
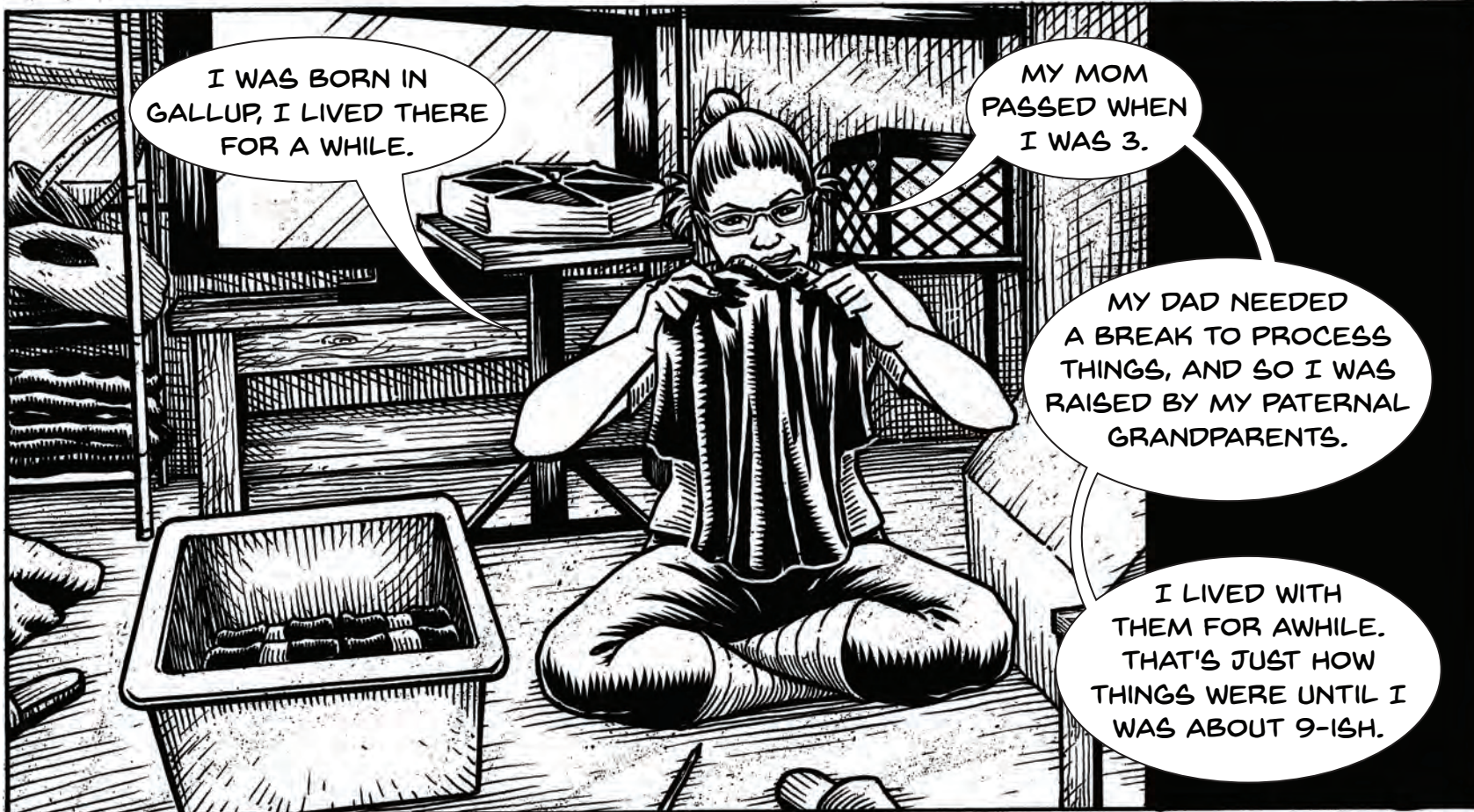
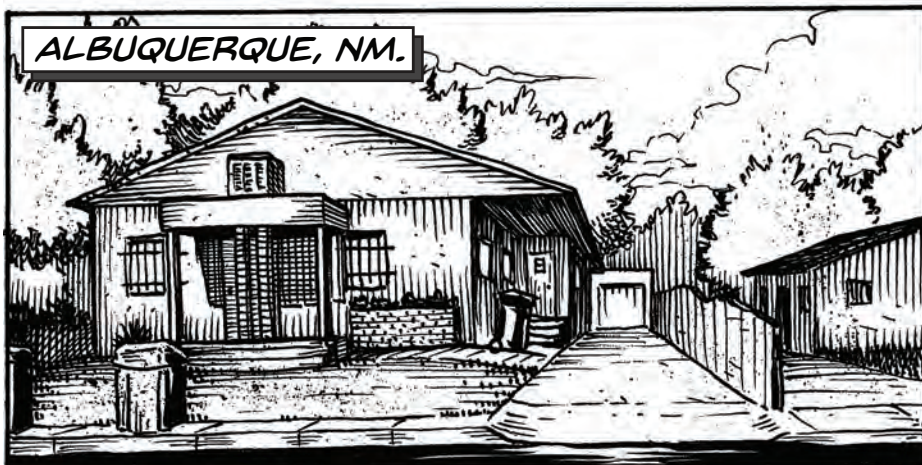
FIRST, THEY NEEDED A NAME.



LIZ AND LISA
DIDN'T
KNOW THEIR
INSTRUMENTS
VERY WELL...



BUT BECKI DID.





THIS IS MY
PARTNER,
BARNEY.



"I MET HIM FROM
BEING A ZOMBIE
EXTRA IN A
HAUNTED HOUSE.



"I MET LISA IN 2002.

"AROUND 2010, LISA AND I
STARTED GOING TO SHOWS.



BURT'S
TIKI LOUNGE



"THAT WAS OUR THING.



LUNCH
RAB

"SHE'D MADE SOME FRIENDS
WHO WERE IN BANDS."



499
BAT



LIZ WAS LIVING BY HERSELF, AND I THINK SHE DIDN'T WANT TO BE AT HER HOUSE BY HERSELF -- SO WE'D ALWAYS GO OUT.

IT'S WEIRD, 'CAUSE ME AND BECKI WILL TALK ABOUT SHOWS.



WE WERE IN THE SAME ROOM BUT I DIDN'T NOTICE HER.

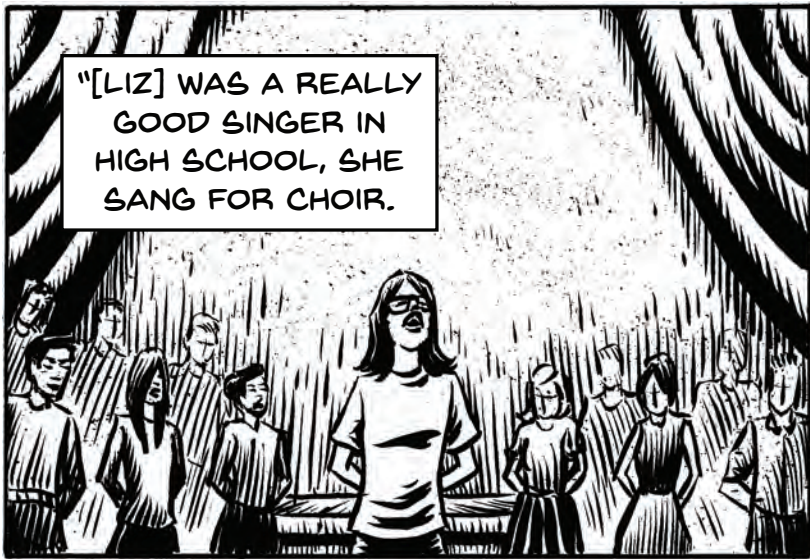
MAYBE FIVE YEARS AGO OR SO, LISA AND I WERE AT THE OLD BURT'S, AND WEEDRAT WAS PLAYING.

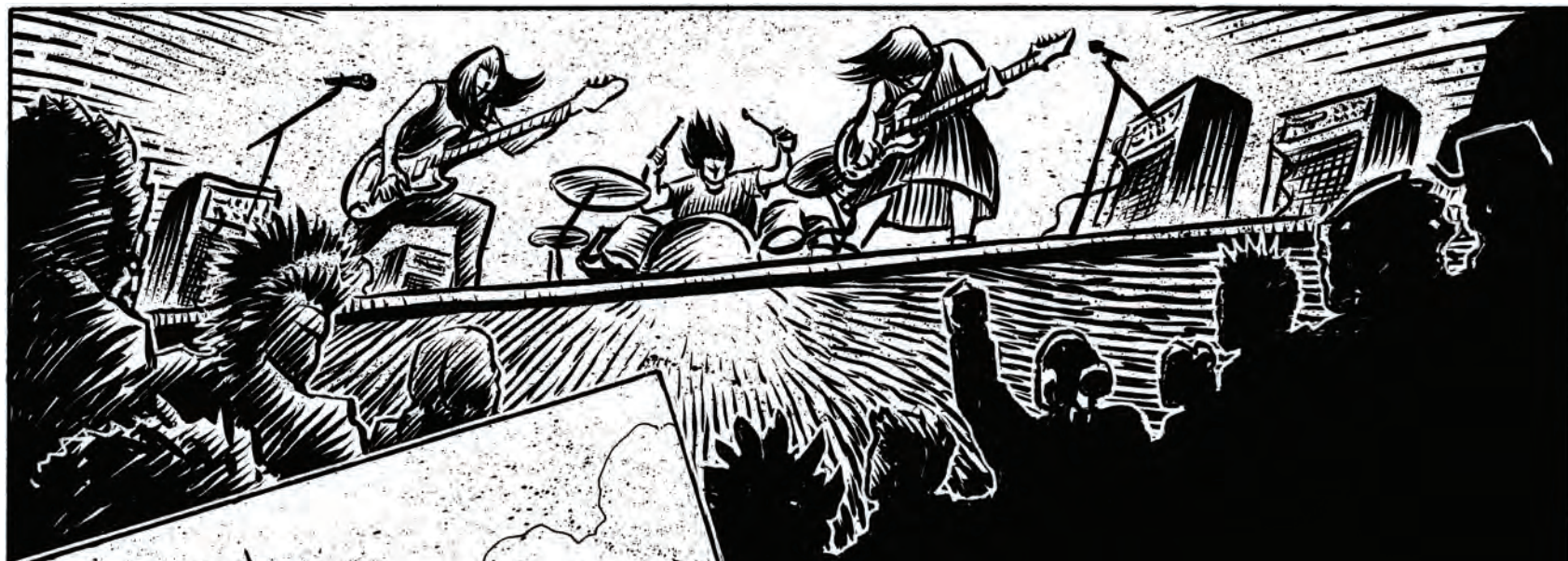


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I SAW, I HEARD THINGS THEY DID
I TOLD YOU AGAIN AND AGAIN
DID YOU HEAR ME? I KNOW YOU HEARD ME
DO YOU HEAR ME STILL?
I NEED YOU TO

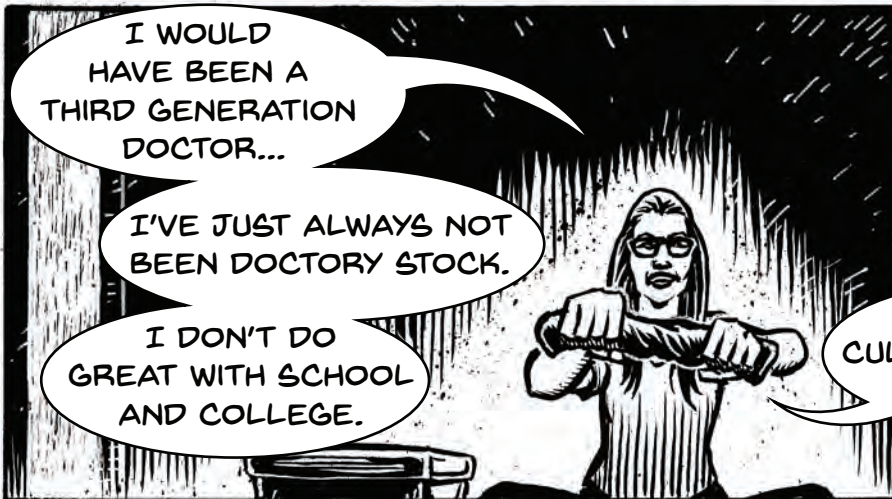




GROWING UP, I DIDN'T REALLY SEE NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN IN THIS MUSICAL FIELD.



"IT'S IMPORTANT TO ME, BEING THAT PERSON THAT SOMEONE COULD LOOK UP TO."

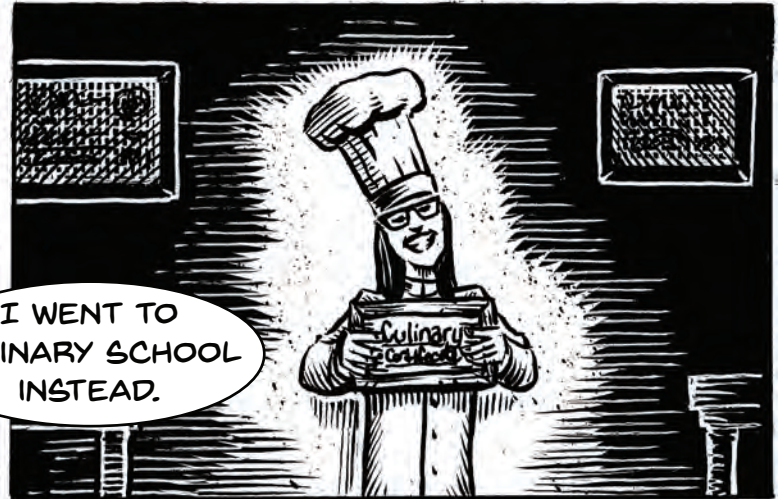


I WOULD HAVE BEEN A THIRD GENERATION DOCTOR...

I'VE JUST ALWAYS NOT BEEN DOCTORY STOCK.

I DON'T DO GREAT WITH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE.

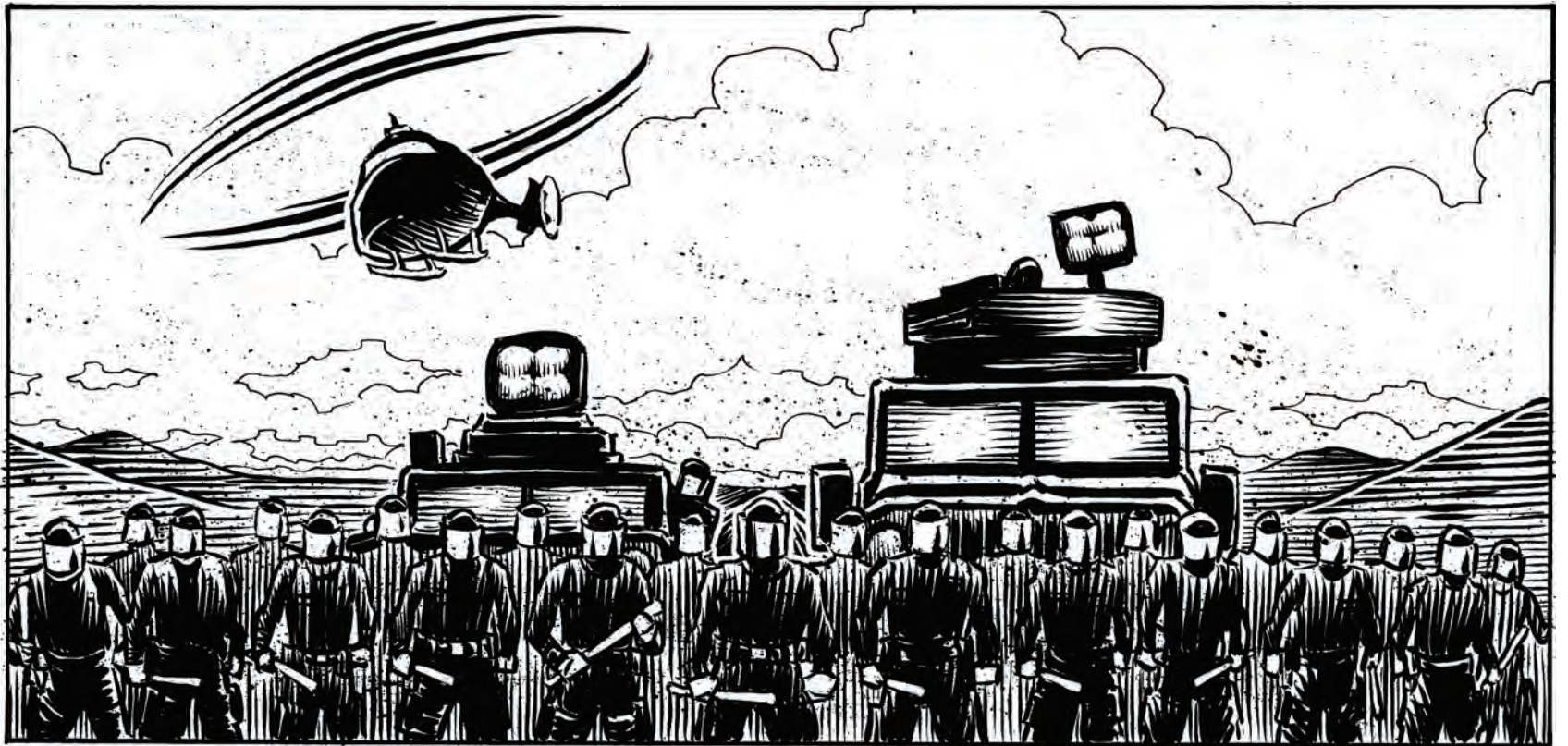
I WENT TO CULINARY SCHOOL INSTEAD.



"UP IN STANDING ROCK, WHEN I WAS THERE, MY POSITION WAS ALWAYS A COOK OF SORTS. I WAS KINDA FEEDING EVERYONE."

"I WAS UP THERE NINE TIMES. DURING THE MONTH OF DECEMBER, I WAS LIVING THERE."

"IT WAS REALLY INTENSE."



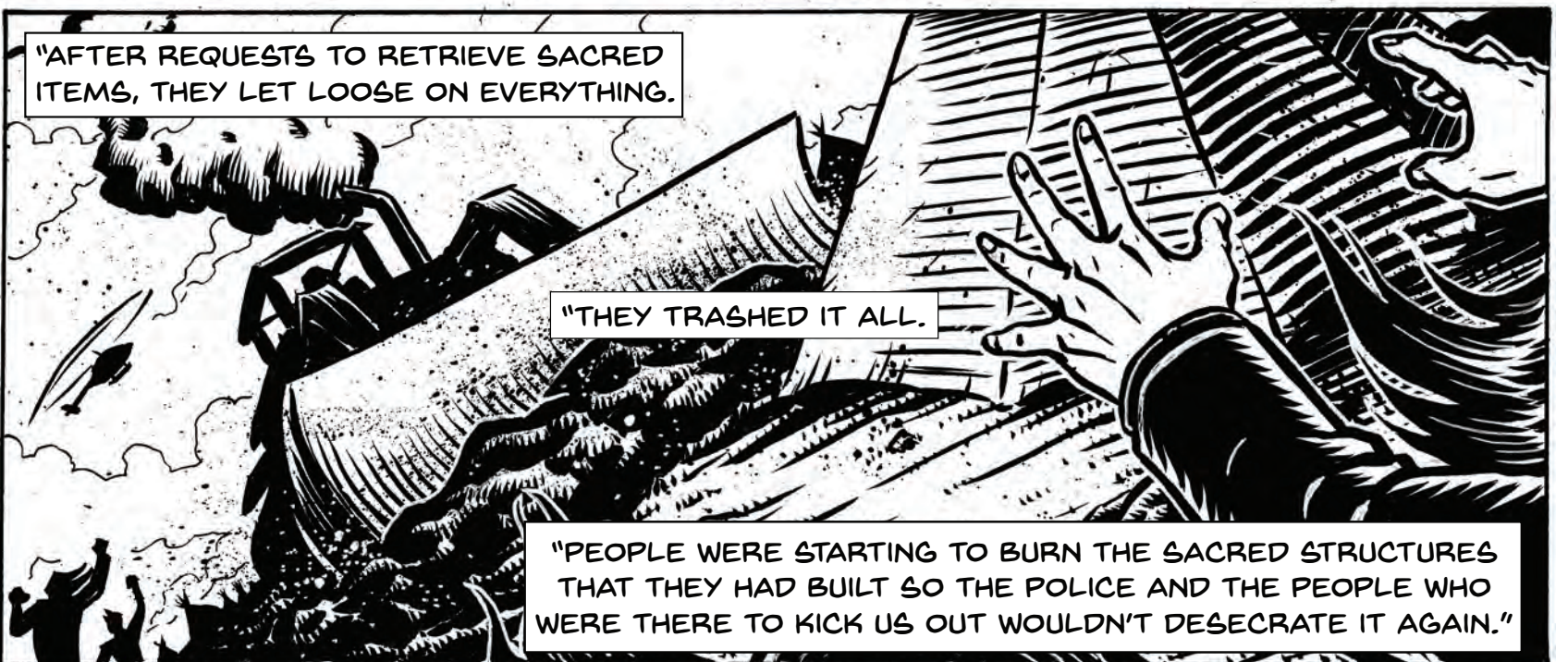
"THERE WAS SURVEILLANCE EVERYWHERE.



"THE THING THAT MESSED ME UP
THE MOST WAS THE CONCEPT
OF INFILTRATORS IN THE CAMP.



"AFTER REQUESTS TO RETRIEVE SACRED
ITEMS, THEY LET LOOSE ON EVERYTHING.



"THEY TRASHED IT ALL.

"PEOPLE WERE STARTING TO BURN THE SACRED STRUCTURES
THAT THEY HAD BUILT SO THE POLICE AND THE PEOPLE WHO
WERE THERE TO KICK US OUT WOULDN'T DESECRATE IT AGAIN."



"WE DON'T HANG OUT EVERY DAY, BUT WE HAVE THIS BOND BEING INDIGENOUS AND FEMME IN THIS WORLD."



WE'RE IN A TIME WHERE WE NEED TO SUPPORT AND BE THERE FOR EACH OTHER.



"WE TRY TO LIFT EACH OTHER UP. WE CAN TELL EACH OTHER THE STRESSES THAT WE ENCOUNTER."



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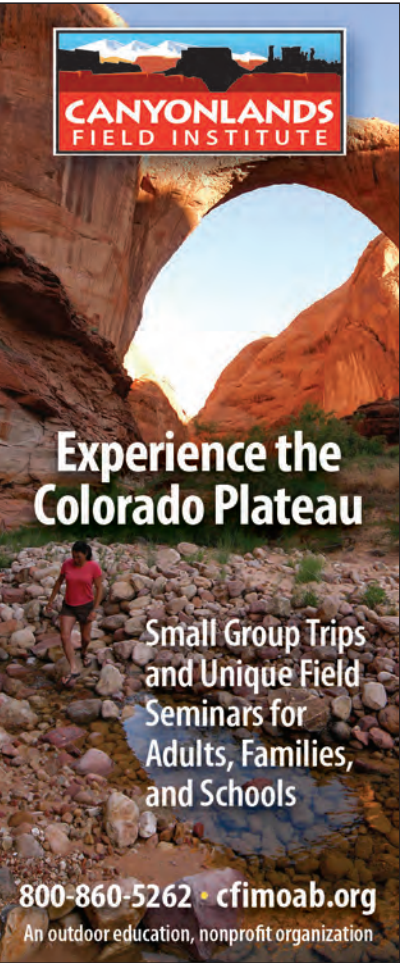
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Road-killed cuisine for the Anthropocene

A moose roadkill near Soldotna, Alaska, being collected by Alaska Moose Federation for distribution to a charity. JOSHUA CORBETT

My mother texts me four photos of a dead moose the week I leave Alaska. It is freshly hit. The pebbled pink brains fanning across the pavement have not yet grayed in the brisk autumn air. The animal will not go to waste. For the past 50 years, Alaska has been the only state where virtually every piece of large roadkill is eaten.

Every year, between 600 and 800 moose are killed in Alaska by cars, leaving up to 250,000 pounds of organic, free-range meat on the road. State troopers who respond to these collisions keep a list of charities and families who have agreed to drive to the scene of an accident at any time, in any weather, to haul away and butcher the remains.

During a recent trip to Fairbanks, my hometown, I asked locals why Alaska's roadkill program has been so successful for so long. "It goes back to the traditions of Alaskans: We're really good at using our resources," Alaska State Trooper David Lorrington told me. Everyone I talked to — biologists, law enforcement, hunters and roadkill harvesters — agreed: It would be embarrassing to waste the meat. In the past few years, a handful of states, including Washington, Oregon and Montana, have started to adopt the attitude that Alaskans have always had toward eating roadkill. An easing of class stigma and a realization of the questionable ethics and economics of leaving dinner to rot by the side of the road have driven ac-

ceptance of the practice in the Lower 48.

The trooper in my mother's photo will have no trouble finding someone to take the moose. It's still daylight, and 200 pounds of good meat are sitting by the side of the road in Anchorage, the state's largest city. The trooper may even wait until the salvagers arrive. Otherwise, someone driving by may grab the moose first.

Alaska's geography, demographics and can-do spirit make it uniquely fit for salvaging roadkill. It is far from the contiguous 48 states, and shipping food can be prohibitively expensive. When Alaska became a state in 1959, it was branded as a loosely governed last frontier where practical know-how and self-reliance were highly valued. Salvaging large roadkill is nothing if not practical. One moose — 300 pounds of meat — is dinner for a year. And if the internal organs have ruptured and tainted the meat, or troopers can't determine the cause of death, they call dogsledgers or trappers. "We have plenty of people willing to take a rotten, nasty moose," Lorrington told me, to use as dog food or bear bait. But roadkill rarely goes bad, wildlife biologist Jeff Selinger told me. People are quick to report large game collisions, and the cold climate limits wildlife diseases that can make meat unfit to eat.

Many Alaskans view animal processing and hunting as commonplace skills, like planting a garden or raising chickens. In a given year, one in four Alaskans

hunts, and between the hunting seasons for moose, bear and caribou, some type of big game is available every day of the year. For those new to hunting, it's easy to join a trip an acquaintance is organizing without having the knowledge to plan the logistics alone. And friends often have equipment available to share.

Joanna Young, a geoscientist and educator, experienced that openness when she moved to Alaska eight years ago to study at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Growing up in the suburbs outside of Toronto, she had no experience farming or butchering, and she was a vegan when she moved. "Fast-forward to three weeks ago: I am out in the middle of the night, covered in blood, using a battery-powered saw to saw through a moose leg. The Joanna of 10 years ago would have never expected this," Young told me in October, describing her experience salvaging a roadkill moose. "It was surreal."

Young's moose was a year or two old, and had been struck in Salcha, an unincorporated town 50 miles from her cabin. It was small enough that Young and two of her friends could drag it to a flat spot to field-dress it. Parts of its hindquarters were unsalvageable — it had been hit from behind — but the organs hadn't ruptured, leaving most of the meat unspoiled. A friend who hunted regularly showed Young how to skin the animal, remove the guts without puncturing the bladder or intestines, and quarter the



A moose neck and ribcage being processed. A motorist who hits an animal may not keep any part of the meat; instead, highway troopers keep a list of residents to receive it. MICHAEL JANSMA

body. Within an hour, the group was driving back to Fairbanks with 100 pounds of meat in their game bags. “Compared to other moose, that is on the low end of the spectrum,” Young said. “But it was high-quality, incredible, free-range meat, so we still consider it a big windfall.”

The attitude toward apprenticeship in Alaska aided Young’s conversion to meat-eater. “There is no stigma around wanting to be a new learner,” she said. “People are really motivated to do things themselves, learn things themselves, build their own structures, get their own food, live their own way.”

In many areas outside of Alaska, it’s hard to imagine how non-hunters would easily learn to kill or process large animals. There are many obstacles: knowledge of anatomy, tracking and marksmanship; the need to travel to remote locations and take time off work; the permits and specialized equipment required to haul, process and store the meat. There are also social barriers. Hunting and salvaging roadkill are often associated with rural people and places, which are seen as conservative and working class. Many people have decided that the cost of hunting is not worth the benefit and shed the skill entirely.

Statewide bans on salvaging roadkill began in the 1950s, when one in 10 people in the Lower 48 hunted; today, it’s only one in 20. When California made picking up roadkill illegal in 1957, the law was supposed to prevent people from poaching

by intentionally smashing into deer with their vehicles. Oregon, Washington and Texas passed similar laws. My mother grew up in Oregon during the ban. When food was tight, her father illegally killed deer — with a gun. Like many people, she laughed at the idea of using an expensive car to capture her dinner.

Forty years later, states began repealing their bans, partly to reduce the workload of state-funded highway cleaning crews. Tennessee was one of the earliest to do so. As a state senator, Tim Burchett received national attention when he proposed a bill to let Tennessee residents collect and eat roadkill without a tag in 1999. His prediction that “everyone’s going to make us look like a bunch of hayseed red-necks” was right. A *Knoxville News Sentinel* headline read “Grease the skillet, Ma! New bill will make road kill legal eatin’,” and a *New York Times* reporter covering the ridicule, inadvertently revealed his own prejudice when he wrote, “As if a state law were preventing anyone from scraping a happy meal off the asphalt. As if anyone would even dream of it.”

The reporter was wrong: Within the last decade, more than five states have lifted or loosened their roadkill restrictions, making eating roadkill legal in more states than not. Today, thousands of people apply for salvage permits each year.

To understand roadkill’s rebranding, it’s helpful to look at how the lobster shifted from trash to treasure within a single generation. Until the late 1800s, lobsters were seen as a low-class

food in the United States. The animal’s abundance was responsible for its status: So many lobsters washed up on the beaches of Plymouth that they formed stacks a foot or two deep.

It took the decimation of the lobster population and the discovery of a new type of customer to elevate the animal from garbage to epicurean treat. In the 1860s, the expanded railroad system and the rise of iceboxes let seafood dealers bring lobsters to inlanders, unfamiliar with the animal’s reputation. Glenn Jones, an oceanographer who poured over thousands of restaurant menus from the 19th century, found that by the 1880s, lobsters had shifted from a cheap salad topping to an expensive entrée.

Today, when I visit Alaska, I usually bring wild frozen salmon back with me for friends. My family catches sockeye on the Kenai Peninsula, in a place Russian colonizers settled over 150 years ago. In their records, the Russians worried that settlers would get sick of all that salmon; apparently the food, just like New England’s lobsters, wasn’t highly regarded in the 1850s. But overfishing, the environmental dangers of farmed salmon, and new customers in the Lower 48 eventually transformed wild salmon into a luxury.

Likewise, the image of a roadkill salvager has changed as concerns about environmental waste, factory farming and the health risks of conventional meat have grown. State Sen. Larry Jent of Montana went so far as to call it a “sin” to waste meat that could be salvaged. Even PETA, the world’s largest animal rights organization, argues for eating roadkill. On some corners of the internet, the stereotyped roadkill-eating hillbilly has been replaced by an environmentally and food conscientious middle-class urbanite.

It’s clear that the ethos of eating roadkill in the Lower 48 is changing. When Washington legalized it in 2016 and Oregon followed suit the next year, there was not the same outbreak of embarrassment and ridicule as when Tennessee had loosened restrictions nearly 20 years earlier. Maybe we’re finally learning how to value resources that are so plentiful they seem almost free. And maybe we’re learning the lesson more quickly than we did with lobster and salmon. Over a recent lunch with my roommates, I suggested bringing some roadkill moose back to Brooklyn after my next trip to Alaska. One stopped lamenting the spoiled food she’d just tossed from our fridge, while the other paused over her plate of pricey, grass-fed beef. Neither had hunted or eaten wild game before, but both were excited at the idea. “Roadkill,” one said, nodding. “That’s the truest free-range.” □

Ella Jacobson, an Alaskan transplant to New York, is a freelance journalist and writer.

The image of a roadkill salvager has changed as concerns about environmental waste, factory farming and the health risks of conventional meat have grown.

Playing Indian



NEWS
COMMENTARY
BY KIM
TALLBEAR

In the early 1990s, I bought a T-shirt at a powwow that read “No! My great-grandmother was not a Cherokee princess!” It was a reference to the practice of non-Natives, with no lived tribal experience, who love telling Native people their own family myth of a Cherokee great-grandmother. The message may have seemed nonsensical to passersby, but to me and my family, it was hilarious.

In the United States, it’s common for us to hear improbable tales of being “part” Cherokee. Sometimes, there are assertions of Blackfeet or Apache ancestry. Considering how far away those tribal nations typically are from the claimants, both physically and culturally, many actual Native people struggle not to roll our eyes when the story comes up. The T-shirt, as it turned out, did not at all help to curb that tendency. Eye-roll.

Twenty years later, this most American of family legends began its journey to the spotlight in national politics when Elizabeth Warren, during her U.S. Senate run in Massachusetts in 2012, claimed to have Cherokee and Delaware ancestry. At the time, when asked if I would vote for her, I said, “Yes,” despite disappointment with her cliché claim to a Native ancestor with “high cheekbones.” These days, however, I can’t answer that question in the same way.

Indian great-grandmother stories are a central part of the American myth. In his book *Playing Indian*, Harvard historian Philip Deloria documented the history of non-Natives engaging in “redface.” Since the 18th century, non-Natives have dressed as Indians at the Boston Tea Party, in fraternal orders, in the Boy Scouts, within the New Age movement, and in sports, as racist mascots. For hundreds of years, settlers have donned and absorbed Indigenous images and histories even while massacring and starving Indigenous people.

Be it by the barrel of a carbine or a mail-order DNA test, Indigenous people must disappear for the United States to thrive.

Deloria cites English writer and poet D.H. Lawrence, who wrote that an “essentially ‘unfinished’ and incomplete” American consciousness produced an “unparalleled national identity crisis.” He continued: “No place exerts its full influence upon a newcomer until the old inhabitant is dead or absorbed.” For Lawrence, the “unexpressed spirit of America” could not be fulfilled without Indians being exterminated or assimilated. A few decades later, Spokane author Sherman Alexie echoed these sentiments in a poem, writing “In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written, all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts.”

In the case of DNA, science now offers a kinder, gentler hand in the disappearing of Native people. The personal genomics industry peddles racist and colonial ideas of the unassimilated Native — notions that shape scientists’ search for the supposedly biologically distinct, or “unadmixed,” Native, which privileges “purer” Natives in research in order to gain a better view into an ancient, less-civilized humanity. Living Indigenous people sampled in the course of research become proxies for ancient humans. Genetic science, which seeks to sample Indigenous people before they vanish into a sea of admixture, actually help to vanish Indigenous peoples by implying that “mixed” Natives are less Native.

In the settler-colonial belief system, genetic ancestry is a defining trait of what it is to be “Native

American.” Yet Native people’s own notions of belonging, in addition to tribal definitions, emphasize lived social relations, both with human relatives and with our nonhuman relatives in our traditional lands and waters. Genetic ancestry alone is a shallow definition of who we are, as are the human-centric views of settler-colonists that place humans above nonhuman plants and animals.

Indigenous analyses run counter to many of these settler-colonial ideas, but are often misunderstood, ignored or framed as being political fodder. In the 19th century, for example, settlers accused us of being in the way of “progress” in order to justify land theft, massacres, and forced assimilation. Today, we are seen as in the way of progress if we resist pipelines, genetic research or DNA testing that objectifies us as bodies and identities to be studied and consumed. Both then and now, settler states and actors, in the pursuit of private property, profit, individual advancement or self-actualization, do not understand Indigenous worldviews, and resort to violence or appropriation instead of collaboration, colonialism instead of kinship.

Today, Democrats peddle a story of multicultural progress, inclusion and absorption into the imperial state. Elizabeth Warren’s DNA test and the arguments defending it reflect that narrative. But that story, like the one sold by Republicans, is based in a worldview that holds private property as sacred and the state as morally exceptional. For Indigenous people, private property is devastating to our lives and cultures. It devastates the planet by enabling natural resource extraction, including DNA, for profit. Meanwhile, the idea of moral exceptionalism in North America is informed by the genocide of Indigenous people: physically, symbolically, politically and scientifically. The stories that settlers insist on telling about the world, their world, have life-and-death repercussions for the planet, humans included.

This is the legacy that Elizabeth Warren inherits and champions. In the years since her claims to being Cherokee, she has ignored Cherokee requests to meet and rectify her assertions — a clear illustration of her lack of integrity, commitment or relation to the very people she claims to have descended from. Instead of kinship, she has chosen colonialism. She is a bad relative, as are the political conservatives and liberals that share a common, anti-Indigenous bond — a story that sacrifices Indigenous worldviews and the good relations between humans and non-humans those beliefs espouse.

Would I vote for Warren if she becomes the 2020 Democratic presidential nominee? Today, the answer is, “No.” I was raised deep inside the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor party by a mother intimately involved in party politics. But she also centered a Dakota view of history and peoplehood, and a sense that our primary allegiance is not to the settler state, but to Dakota ancestors and living relations, including our traditional lands and waters — relational views of peoplehood not uncommon to Indigenous communities.

I lost that Cherokee great-grandmother shirt years ago, but the joke continues to circulate through Indian Country, this time, with a presidential candidate as the punchline. Raised on settler narratives and mythologies, Warren is one of millions of Americans who would “play Indian” in a quest to absorb Indigenous people, whom the state has failed to completely exterminate. □

Kim TallBear is Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Peoples, Technoscience, and Environment in the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta.

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The West through a European lens

The Basque Country of northern Spain and southern France is a land of misty coastlines and damp mountains — green and soft. Yet in the 19th and 20th centuries, many Basques immigrated to some of the driest regions of the United States, to places like Nevada, eastern Oregon and Idaho. One Basque shepherd recalled his first experiences after arriving in Nevada: “I wasn’t much more than 16 years old, you know. And they sent me into the desert with a dog and 3,000 sheep. ... Though Basques are used to being alone, these deserts were something else.”

A century later, a family from the Spanish Basque Country relocated to the urban wilds of Reno. Bernardo Atxaga’s *Nevada Days* once again raises the question: How does someone who grew up in a verdant European countryside respond, mentally and physically, to a bone-dry land with blazing horizons? In the case of Atxaga, one of the Basque Country’s most celebrated writers, it stirred up old memories and prompted a sprawling series of stories within a story. Atxaga (pronounced “Achaga”) spent the academic year of 2007-2008 in a writer’s program at the University of Nevada, accompanied by his wife and two school-age daughters. Ten years later, he published *Nevada Days*. Technically a novel, it retains the realistic feel of a travelogue — and, presumably, it is largely just that. But the distinction here between fiction and nonfiction may not be that important anyway. Perhaps the most valuable quality of *Nevada Days* is that it gives the American reader the opportunity to reimagine a familiar Western landscape from an articulate outsider’s perspective.

Atxaga’s observations highlight the particularities of a Nevada-style desert. Soon after arriving in Reno, the central character of *Nevada Days* writes a letter to a friend back home about a long drive with a friendly neighbor. He had been expecting a *Lawrence of Arabia* kind of landscape, a sea of sand. Instead, he found trees and shrubs, “piles of rocks” and trapezoidal mountains. “Seeing those trapezoid mountains in the distance, I got quite confused. I lost all sense of time and space. If someone had told me that I was travelling in the Discovery space shuttle rather than in Earle’s Chevrolet Avalanche, that we were crossing outer space and not the Nevada desert, I would have believed them.” But later that fall, his “mind turns the corner”: Walking into a dusty bookshop in Reno, he encounters just the right kind of silence, and then just the right kind of music (*Summertime ... and the living is easy*). This “lent Nevada a pleasant lightness and suddenly it didn’t seem so very difficult to live there.”

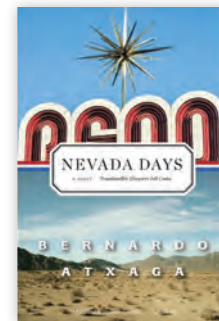
Arguably, it is place, rather than

people, that drives this novel. Nevada and its natural features are imbued with Atxaga’s underlying themes of violence, death and memory. Rattlesnakes and alien, abstracted mountain shapes suggest an existential threat. Black widow spiders, and the kind of people who keep them, represent the very real threat of a killer who stalks young women at the University of Nevada and makes Atxaga’s main character fearful for his daughters. Meanwhile, the raccoon that makes regular appearances in the backyard — initially a startling figure with eyes that shine in the night — becomes a comforting source of consistency in the family’s Reno home.

The landscape of language plays a role here, too. Atxaga is a much-admired author who has published in both Spanish and Basque; *Nevada Days* was written in Basque, translated into Spanish by Atxaga, and then rendered into a recognizably British form of English by a professional translator. The text emphasizes sensations, metaphor and musings that leave the reader with visceral impressions: mysterious desert, loud city, intimidating mountains. Westerners might expect Atxaga to present a clichéd version of his visit, developing Old

West tropes of ghost towns, brothels and vulgar Americana. But though Atxaga is not interested in tearing down American culture, he does bring the critical eye of an outsider to its peculiarities. In the spring, the novel’s main character drives to Lake Tahoe to attend the memorial service of a soldier who was killed in Iraq. When he gets to the little mountain church, he is alarmed by the sentimental military poetry and the priest’s “velvety voice” repeating the refrain — “Honor. Duty. Sacrifice” — while speaking about a war that many found immoral. As he often does, Atxaga responds to Nevada by invoking references to European events and commentators, creating unexpected yet relevant connections that prompt the reader to reframe familiar ideas. In this case, the main character imagines himself reciting his own lines — created in response to the 2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid — at the American soldier’s service: “Life is life / And the most precious thing of all. / To lose a life is to lose everything.”

For Westerners concerned about the danger of cultural myopia, *Nevada Days* is a gift: a foreigner’s snapshot of place that is personalized, literary and thoughtful. BY SIERRA STANDISH



Nevada Days
Bernardo Atxaga
352 pages,
softcover: \$16.
Graywolf Press, 2018.

A child drags an ATV back to the start line of the Mud Drag Race during the annual Pine Nut Festival in Schurz, Nevada. NINA RIGGIO





Artificially increasing the temperature of the desert floor at this southeastern Utah test site helps researchers determine the effects of warming on plant and animal species.

CGP GREY CC VIA FLICKR

The shutdown is stalling good science



NEWS
COMMENTARY
BY KRISTINA
YOUNG

In southern Utah, there is a patch of desert heated by infrared lamps. The lamps hang just above the plants and soil crusts commonly found in the area surrounding Moab. These lamps help scientists study how temperature increases impact plants and soils living in this already hot desert. On any given day, science technicians can be seen reaching underneath the lamps to measure the size of each grass blade and the number of seeds on each shrub. The information helps land managers know what to expect from ecosystems as temperatures increase, allowing them to manage for both ecosystem integrity and multiple land uses as the climate changes. During this partial government shutdown, however, the plants are going unmeasured, cutting off the continuous observations necessary for careful science and creating a gap in this long-term data set.

When the government partially shut down on Dec. 21, sending home employees from the U.S. Geological Survey, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service, important science being done across the country ground to a halt, with consequences extending beyond the loss of plant measurements or the paychecks these employees rely on.

In parts of the West, where the economy is tied directly to the integrity of federal lands, using science to understand how these landscapes work and respond to change is essential to the economic well-being of the region. Economic drivers occurring on federal lands — including recreation, resource extraction, grazing and wildlife resources — rely on science to inform evidence-based management. While research universities generate some of this science, the sheer extent of public lands in the West requires the region to rely on government scientists to provide additional research about how to manage these lands.

The partial shutdown has thrown federally conducted science and the science occurring on federal lands into disarray. It has delayed or canceled conferences that are necessary for research and for sharing and learning new information. Applications for research permits on federal lands and the hiring of seasonal or contractual employees have been halted. Scientists who need research funding can't get it. My own research — exploring how nutrients move through desert soils — has been impacted. Ongoing work to publish research has been delayed owing to lack of access to my government collaborators, and decisions about federal fellowships I've applied for and

am relying on to complete my dissertation research with the University of Texas at El Paso have been put on hold.

In the West, the immediate impacts extend beyond the science and scientists themselves to the volunteers, educators and visitors who are no longer able to engage with the science and science-related resources the region has to offer. The loss of paychecks and visitors measurably impacts our economy. The unquantified impacts do the same, damaging the science being generated with the help of taxpayer dollars and diminishing our ability to use science to the advantage of our landscapes and economies.

While the short-term consequences of disruption to federal and federally supported science are substantial, the long-term consequences can be severe. Entire seasons of data collection may have to be canceled due to a backlog of hiring and funding. Important cultural and scientific resources on public lands face the risk of vandalism or destruction without federal employees and volunteers monitoring them. Over the long haul, disruptions in funding for scientists who rely on consistent access to research sites, laboratories, seasonal personnel and volunteers can easily drive top scientists away from federal agencies. The likelihood of losing federal scientists to university or private sector jobs only grows as the current shutdown becomes one of the longest in U.S. history, as well as the second multiday shutdown of 2018. Without the best minds working to understand our federal lands and their pressing problems, our ability to manage and adapt suffers, and so do we.

Out in the desert, the plants and soils are continuing to respond to the heat-lamp-induced warming, with no one to track their responses. Meanwhile the region's average air temperatures continue to climb. As land use and climate change accelerate in the West, we all lose when avoidable shutdowns degrade our ability to understand, manage and adapt to the changing world around us. In the West, continuity in science matters. Let's remind our elected officials that Westerners value consistent science funding for the betterment of the lands and economies we rely on. □

As land use and climate change accelerate in the West, we all lose when avoidable shutdowns degrade our ability to understand, manage and adapt to the changing world around us. In the West, continuity in science matters.

Kristina Young is a scientist living in Southeast Utah. She is a former Wyss Scholar for the Conservation of the American West and the host and producer of the regional science show *Science Moab* on KZMU.

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THE WEST

The Weekly Sun in Hailey, Idaho, has a surefire hit in its “pet obituary” page. The family of the deceased writes the obit and pays \$1 for every 16 words, with a large color photo included. We enjoyed reading about an adopted Jack Russell terrier-rat terrier mix named Frankie, who passed away “in his daddy’s arms,” aged 15. Frankie, a Bellevue resident, was both “king and baby of the house.” He enjoyed many interests and hobbies, said his “parents,” Aric and Mandi Iverson, including the games “Bally” and “blanket monster” and “destroying all toys to get the squeakers out of them.” He always looked forward to Christmas because he could “unwrap presents that weren’t his own,” and he also liked to “jump up and wrap his arms around your neck and lick your face.” Survivors include friends of various species, among them several iguanas.

Unfortunately, not all dogs are as winsome as Frankie. In Grand Junction, Colorado, an alleged “service dog” inside a gas station turned out to be a biter, and his human parents failed to accept responsibility. In the *Daily Sentinel’s* “You Said It” column, the victim pointed out, “Claiming that your dog is a service animal doesn’t actually mean it’s a service dog. Service animals are to aid in a specific task, not bite someone completely unprovoked. ... A little apology goes much further than blatant excuses.”

WASHINGTON

Seattle’s 65-year-old Alaskan Way Viaduct, which cut right through the heart of the city’s downtown, is closed. About 100,000 daily drivers will have to find other ways to get around until its replacement, a \$4 billion tunnel, opens in several weeks. But some residents seemed goofy with joy, standing on the deserted road Jan. 15 and singing as they bade good riddance to it. Writing in the *Urbanist*, Doug Trumm noted that the highway wasn’t built to withstand earthquakes and had always been a “death trap.” His concluding words constituted an anti-eulogy: “I hope the viaduct’s concrete spirit burns in highway hell next to a bunch of other overbuilt freeways that have fueled massive carbon emissions and paved our way to a climate-change crisis.”



ARIZONA Willy Wonka’s chocolate road project. ARIZONA DEPT. PUBLIC SAFETY

ARIZONA

Boatman’s Quarterly Review likes to profile the river guides who raft people down the Colorado River and through the rapids of Grand Canyon. Asked, “What’s the craziest question anyone has asked you?” guide Stephen D’Arrigo, 32, recalled a doozy: One of his passengers, while gazing at the ancient walls rising above the river, speculated: “So ... the miners dug this part of the canyon?” D’Arrigo said that what keeps him guiding after 12 years is seeing the dramatic effect the canyon has on people, with some experiencing “life-changing trips.”

ARIZONA

Who didn’t relish hearing about the delicious rollover of a tanker truck in Flagstaff, Arizona, (see photo above) which caused 3,500 gallons of chocolate to flood the highway. “This will be a sweet cleanup!” chortled the Arizona Department of Public Safety, as CNN showed a tide of the bubbling brown goo. We hope drivers waiting for the tanker to be towed away had the chance to stick in a finger — or maybe a bucket, or two . . .

Meanwhile, *The Daily Record* in Virginia cited a British study that found chocolate to be an excellent cough suppressant; a dose can apparently calm coughs quickly and is on a par with store-bought remedies. We love science.

THE WEST

WFSB-TV in Anchorage did not explain how the hefty moose gained entry to the hospital, but it showed a video of it strolling through the waiting room. The animal snacked on some of the room’s potted plants — “Oh, he’s hungry,” an employee guessed — then turned around and moseyed out the open front door.

In Montana, a similar story involved a bison named “Tonto the Buffalo,” which escaped from a backyard pen in the Bitterroot Valley. Walking at a “leisurely pace,” reports KPAX-TV, Tonto visited backyards until his owner appeared, whereupon the bison “followed his owner back home.”

IDAHO

Doug Clegg has been a volunteer for 10 years with the Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge in Nampa, Idaho, cleaning up garbage and noting damage to

fences. Recently, he noticed a handwritten sign fixed to a recently vandalized gate. (“Someone hits it every year,” he explained.) The sign read: “Make America great again ... destory (sic) ‘public lands.’” Clegg told the *Idaho Press* that he simply added the note to the 70 pounds of waste that he and his wife removed that day.

CALIFORNIA

The government shutdown has been especially hard on Joshua Tree National Park, just two hours from Los Angeles. With no one on duty for 1,200 square miles, people have been chopping down the iconic trees, illegally off-roading and spray-painting rocks. Longtime visitor Rand Abbot told the *Washington Post* he goes every day to clean park bathrooms and to “kindly persuade people to not destroy the park. ... People think they own the park. They don’t own it. They’re guests in the park.”

WEB EXTRA For more from Heard around the West, see hcn.org.

Tips and photos of Western oddities are appreciated and often shared in this column. Write betsym@hcn.org or tag photos [#heardaroundthewest](https://www.instagram.com/heardaroundthewest) on Instagram.



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