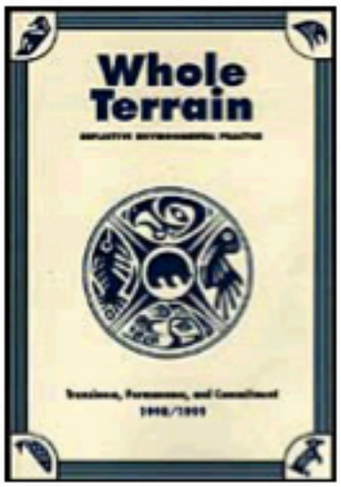
1998-99: Transience, Permanence, and Commitment

Volume 7: 1998-1999

In our lives of movement and impermanence, how do we strengthen our commitment to the environment as we change our commitment to place? Authors reflecting on questions of identity, belonging, and connection in the midst of mobility and change prompt us to develop a sense of commitment and kinship with the land, even those places that are only temporarily in our lives.



Introduction

Sherri Miles, Editor

Poetry

- **At Home**
  Linda Lizut Helstern
- **Meditation Point**
  Jan Bailey
- **Snapdragons and Superman**
  Dana Garrett
- **Quilting**
  Alesia Maltz
- **Aporia**
  Jane Routh

Essays

- **Off The Map**
  Chellis Glendinning
- **Meditation on Two Salamanders**
  Reyes Garcia
- **Fragments of Vanished Lives**
  John Elder
- **Not Wandering, Not Staying Put**
  A. d'Forrest Ketchin
- **Each Sky Its Own Blue**
  an interview with David Abram
- **Transience and Permanence Forever Unfolding**
  Mitchell Thomashow
- **Searching the Song of Place**
  Beth McDermott
- **Undulating Through Raindrops**
  Gregory Tomb
- **Altars of Bleached Memories**
  Nancy Deever
- **The Trail to Green Mountain**
  Nat Scrimshaw
- **The Kootenai Five**
  Rick Bass
- **Journal Reflections on the Thai-Burmese Border**
  Elias Amidon

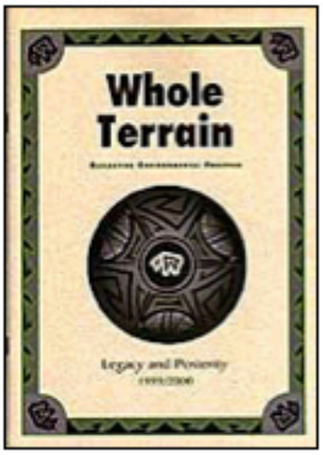
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1999-00: Legacy and Posterity

Volume 8: 1999-2000

Writers in this issue reflect on the importance of environmental legacy in our lives. For some contributors, legacy is held in a landscape, a generation, a mentor, a dream. For others, it is embodied in environmental heroes. A common theme throughout explores how a legacy of caring is passed from one generation to the next, and how such a living legacy can both nurture and alter our environmental history.



Introduction

Sherri Miles

Poetry

- **The Gorillas in the Philadelphia Zoo**
  Howard Nelson
- **Moments of Youth**
  Liza Jeswald
- **The Early Protectors**
  Bruce Berger
- **Pictographs**
  Jeff Bickart

Essays

- **By the Light of John Muir; an interview with Lee Stetson**
  Fred Taylor
- **A Naturalist's Legacy of Caring**
  Ann Zwinger
- **The Art of Mentoring**
  Ricardo Sierra
- **Mentors**
  Larry Daloz
- **Intergenerational Ambivalence**
  Janet Pivnick
- **Recollections of my Father: an interview with Nina Leopold Bradley**
  Russell Sewell and Clifford Knapp
- **Communication Between Senior Citizens and Children in Nature Schools**
  Shigeyuki Okajima
- **Haystacks and Hay-bales, Pumpkins and Seeds:Transmitting the Treasures of Childhood**
  Rabbi Everett Gendler
- **Remembering Gramps**
  Katherine Fiveash
- **The Biography of a Landscape**
  Maria Isabel Garcia
- **A Sense of Wonder: an interview with Kaiulani Lee**
  Sherri Miles
- **The Remembering**
  Ana Charvelle
- **Native Heritage: A Tradition of Participation**
  Simon Ortiz

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Whole Terrain

In the Midst of Mobility and Change

We are explorers. We gaze at the horizon, the mountaintop, the moon, and our thoughts travel far beyond. We reach for those places that are as far as the eye can see, heading out over boundless waters and unknown terrain in the search for new lands. All throughout history people have been on the move. Early explorers dispersed from East Africa, Asia, and Europe more than 30,000 years ago, eventually reaching the coastlines of Australia, the Americas, Greenland and other arctic areas, and spreading far and wide across the continents. For tens of thousands of years, lands have been explored, settled, and left. Mobility is not a new phenomenon.

The search for something better continues to pull travelers to new lands and resources, and away from the conditions of war, political persecution, and overcrowding that have created 27.4 million refugees worldwide, the largest count of uprooted people in history. Even in lands of relative political stability, the demands of work and the call of opportunity ask us to be mobile and rootless. In such a tumbleweed existence, how do we find the connection that helps us care, that nourishes our being, that inspires our commitment to the land and community?

This issue of Whole Terrain considers questions of identity, belonging, and connection in the midst of mobility and change. In a life of transience and permanence, with people moving across the land, the land itself always changing, and communities constantly shifting, place has never felt so ephemeral. We ask new acquaintances, "Where are you from?" and the answers are not simple. Now or in the past? Which place? When you meet someone from your own neck of the woods, immediately you feel a bond of shared knowledge and familiarity.We have a strong desire for that connection, to be intimately "of" somewhere, yet in these times of increased mobility we may only touch down briefly and shallowly in a place, and we can be acutely aware of the absence of a deeper connection.

Transience instills the feeling that wherever you live doesn't belong to you. It is someone else's, belonging to the people who really live there. A personal sense of stewardship or responsibility is stifled in the belief that they are the caretakers. Even our own interest in the place, or concern for it, may never develop, feeling we are just passing through. I myself never tried to integrate my family into our current community, as it was clear when we arrived as tenants two years ago that we could only "borrow" a home here temporarily. I never felt the place was truly mine to know and love. I never made the effort to really know the people. My children, however, share none of my adult reticence; they are the root-makers, reaching out like tendrils wherever we live to find their way among the hills and trees, among the roads and houses, and mostly, among the people. I follow behind a bit reluctantly, jaded perhaps from too many moves to too many places. Now our borrowed house is sold and we are on our way again, wondering where the next home will be, and for how long....

People are concerned with maintaining an identity, with finding a rooted connection to place and culture as we move from place to place; as migrants, refugees, and entrepreneurs seek greater economic opportunity beyond the borders that once held them; and as we, in this country particularly, honor ties to jobs and opportunities, rather than to homesteads or communities. Chellis Glendinning asks, "What place can a people call home?" and the authors of this issue get to the heart of her question, sharing with you their gratitude and love for special, even sacred, ties to the land; their wistfulness and sensitivity about being uprooted and out of place; and their passionate actions taken after committing to a landscape or community.

The issue begins with writers exploring ancestral connections to the land through their own historical roots or through stories held in the land. Living in a land-based Chicano village, Chellis Glendinning hears stories of clashing cultures, and learns from the native peoples of New Mexico the way of the land before the anglos arrived with border plans and road maps. Returning periodically to his family's ranches in southern Colorado, Chicano professor Reyes Garc'a renews ties to his ancestors and strengthens his own commitment to working for the earth. John Elder writes about finding himself in a history in Bristol, Vermont, a place the original Abenaki Indians of Vermont so long made their home. And Anne d'Forrest Ketchin explores the anthropological notion of transhumance, the patterned and mobile lifeway of the ancients. Ancestral ties anchor us in a past and provide a cord to hold on to as we journey. Finding such connections can be a powerful link to one's identity in the present. These stories remind us that no place is without history, and that we ourselves are the ancestors of people who will one day stake their own claims to the ground over which we walk.

Other stories about putting down roots touch on being native, being out of place, being longterm. Recognizing that many of us live in multiple worlds, and are only temporarily in our place, David Abram emphasizes the importance of opening up our senses to the worlds around us to notice their magic and nuances of change. Mitchell Thomashow aspires to be more than someone "just passing through," to become native to his place by gaining intimate knowledge of its flora and fauna. And growing up Caucasian in Hawaii, Beth McDermott questions when one can claim a heritage, wanting to belong to her tropical homeland by place if not by race. These authors, as well as several others throughout the issue, consider the internal and external implications of being native, and reveal the conflicts they've faced being, in ecological terms, an exotic, or introduced species.

Environmental work itself can lead to a transient way of life, to a rootlessness grounded in commitment. Professionals conducting field research or working for education centers often face an ironic dilemma: stay in one place and make a home, or answer the call to work for the earth somewhere else, again and again. Gregory Tomb's work as a wildlife biologist lands him in an unwelcoming logging town for five years, and he finds community not among the people, but in the natural world. In her attempt to acclimate to New England after leaving the southwest, Nancy Deever travels the forests as she had once traveled the desert, and learns that the sacred exists in all places; one only has to look to find it. These authors offer the comforting thought, present in other essays as well, that the natural world can be a powerful ally in a new place — the first to welcome you, and the one over time that holds you in its embrace, saying, I'm glad you're here.

No collection of essays about transience and permanence would be complete without stories of special places lost; stories of progression dividing the old and the new, of change displacing communities and generations of roots. Nat Scrimshaw watches the small mountain town of Waterville, New Hampshire develop into a busy ski area, while the community his family had been a part of for generations slowly disappears. Rick Bass writes of activists — peaceable yet passionate in their mission to save the Kootenai Forest — who chain themselves to the forest gate in their race against time. Elias Amidon writes from Ban Krua, a 200-year-old Muslim community in the middle of Bangkok, fighting for its survival against plans for a freeway that would cut through its center. These authors speak about the transience of place at the hand of development. As you wonder if change is inevitable, and progress, unstoppable, watch through their eyes as people stand up to protect the lands and communities they love.

The village of Ban Krua withstood progress and was still whole, Elias realizes, "precisely because the community had stayed loyal to what they loved in this place and in this moment." It is not easy for communities to stay loyal to what they love in a place when the residents so seldom ever stay in one place. We are a transient generation, often finding ourselves setting out for somewhere else, not always knowing when or where we are going to land, when or where we are going to stay. Yet as these essays indicate, our identities can be intensely tied to the places that claim us for a time, places that draw us like magnets back to them, physically or emotionally. They may be as near as a backyard, or as far away as a childhood memory. But wherever they are, they are the places where we are held, places where we notice patterns of familiarity in the passing seasons, in the perennial flower beds, in the lives of our neighbors, and in our own habits.

The essayists and poets of this issue share provocative reflections of moving through the land. As you recognize in their words some of your own passions and perplexities about where you live and where you've left, hear also the intimacies that remain with them as they speak of "grassy lanes of graves," "scudding clouds in the night sky," "bone-singing under concrete," "the Great cinnamon-she Bear," and "zippered slumps of old clearcuts." For it is when we shift our focus from points on the distant horizon to the ground underneath our feet that we see "the many tiny worlds within our world" and notice the magic they participate in around us. Then, even if only for a short time, we become part of a place that remains ever present in our vision.

Sherri Miles, Editor

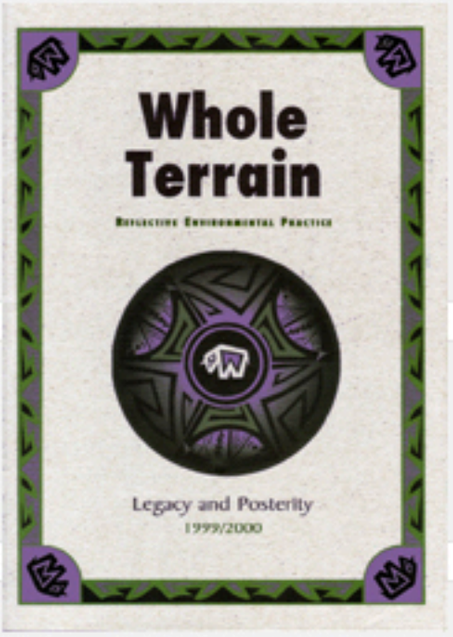
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Whole Terrain journal

Volumes 7 and 8 editor of environmental literary journal published by Antioch University

"The "Transience, Permanence, and Commitment" issue is really a masterpiece of editing, art, and layout. You and Timothy McDonald [artist] and Ty Minton [cover artist] have created the most beautiful publication my own work may ever appear in. Thanks Sherri et al for your labors." *–Reyes Garcia, writer; professor at Fort Lewis College, Colorado*

"Sherri—Having seen the truckload of eggs you had delivered to your office over the course of a year gives me even greater appreciation for the soufflé you've pulled out of the oven. Your interview with Abram presents him in a revealing light through strong, direct questions. And the layout….its readability—starting stories on right-hand pages, judicious use of pertinent illustrations, and half-tones that don't get in the way—makes me want to applaud. Congratulations." *–Paul Hertneky, writer; professor*



"I wanted to write and congratulate you on your fine editorial expertise and stewardship of the 1998/99 Whole Terrain. What a fine job you've done! You should be tremendously proud of your achievement and including the caliber of writers you have! It's a pleasure to see work of such passion and high standards."*—Mary Colleen Liburdi, former editor Audubon International* Stewardship News

"The journal is beautiful. Such wonderful articles and art work. Thanks for your tender care with my piece as well. It was a pleasure working with you."*—Janet Pivnick, writer; doctoral candidate at University of Calgary*

"A superb and utterly professional tenure as editor of Whole Terrain, Sherri oversaw every aspect of the publication. Her judgment, perseverance, sensibility, and sense of excellence were uniformly remarkable. She has a fine future in publication."*—Mitchell Thomashow, former Chair of Environmental Studies at Antioch University, New England; currently President of Unity College, Unity, Maine*

"…my reaction? Appreciation for your thoughtful, careful editing that abbreviated excessive words, removed irrelevant and confusing asides, and altogether produced a leaner, more readable piece. Especially impressive to me was your sensitivity to the flow of the piece and your respect for the general style. Where you changed sentences or re-worked a sequence, not only was the outcome an improvement, but its style was indistinguishable from the original. Beautifully done, thank you!"*—Everett Gendler, rabbi, writer, educator*