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RONER LYNCH BEDELL COOMBS MCCONKEY LOWE-ANKER

IN THE WAKE

Stories of resilience

Thin Black Line: Colstrip, Montana

Dan Wenk stands guard for Yellowstone

Featured Outlaw Mandela van Eeden

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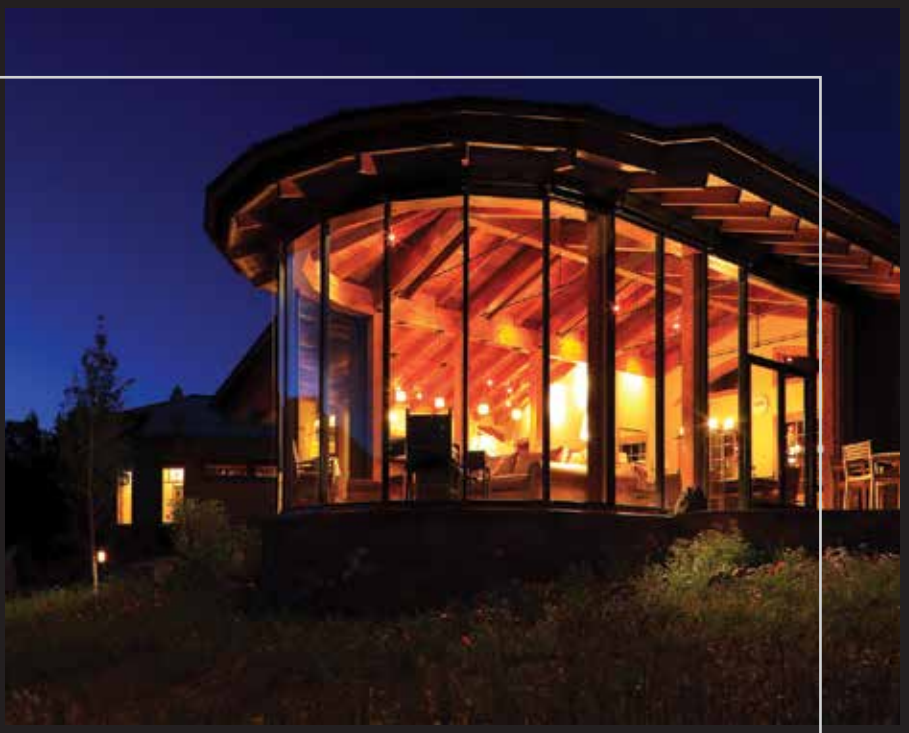

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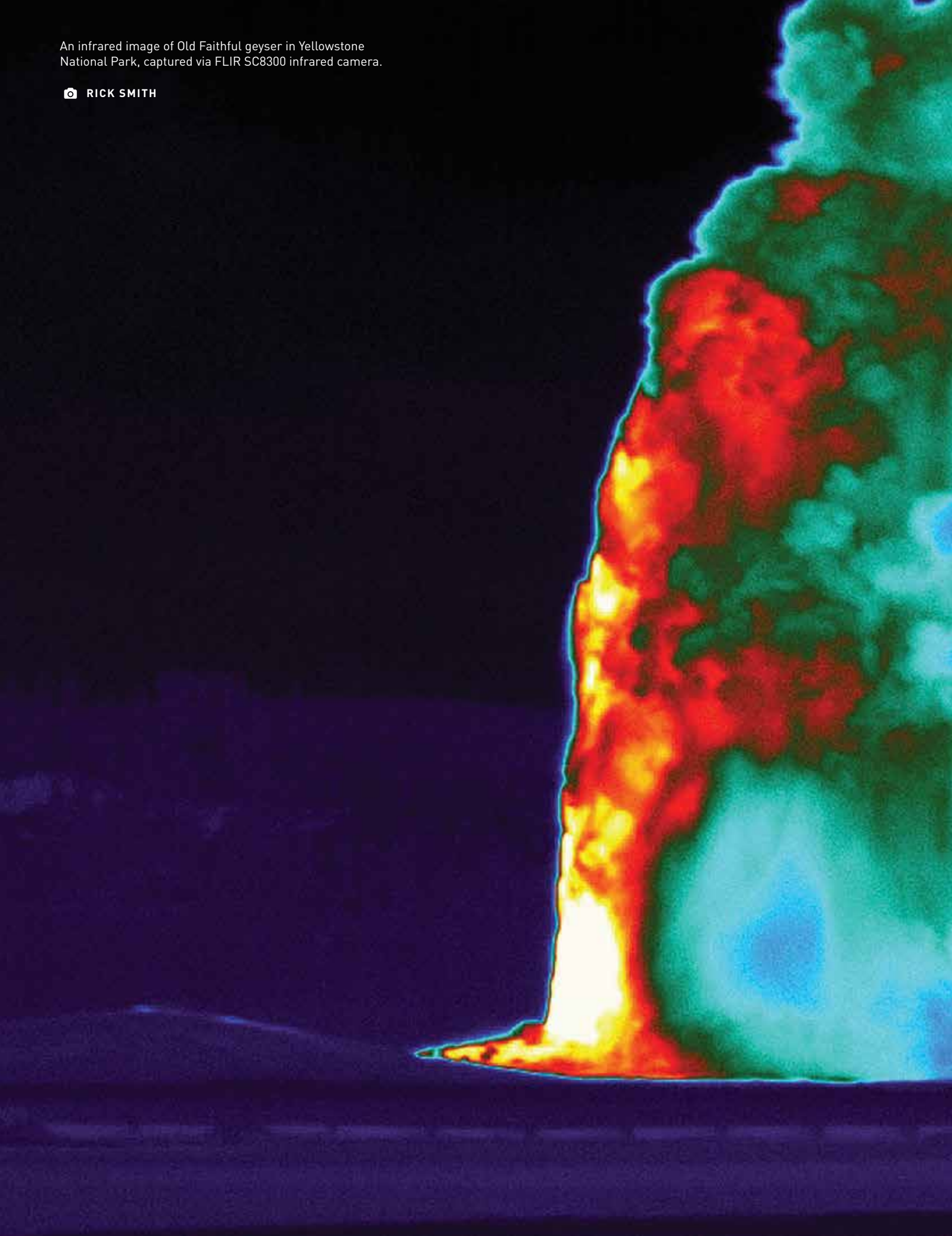

An infrared image of Old Faithful geyser in Yellowstone National Park, captured via FLIR SC8300 infrared camera.

RICK SMITH

FEATURES

DEPARTMENTS

This otter kit kept trying to get mom to play, and she was able to ignore him for all of a few minutes. Otters swim gracefully, run well on land, love to play and wander widely. Unfortunately they have been eliminated from many areas due to trapping and river degradation. Lamar Valley, Yellowstone National Park.

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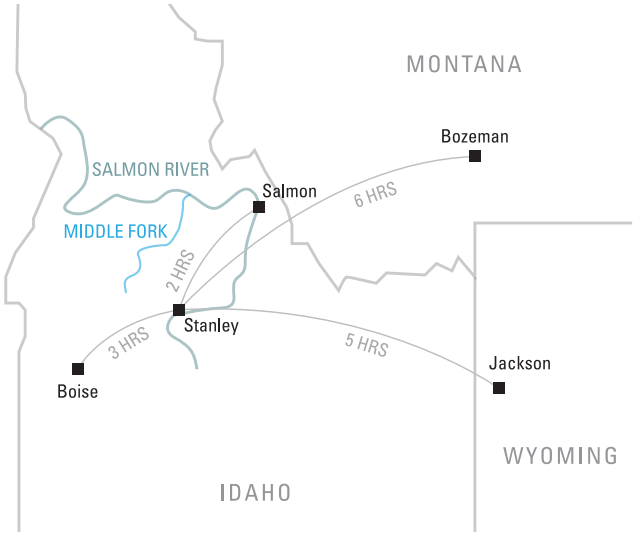

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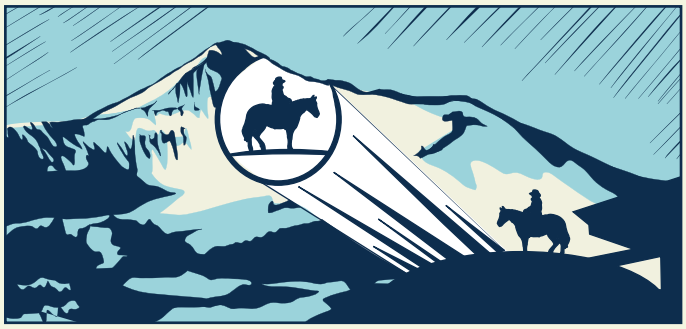

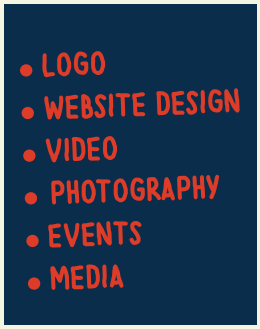

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On the cover: The sun bursts through a rock cairn in the Mission Mountains, Montana. The term "cairn" derives from Middle Gaelic, and these stacks of stones have been used since prehistoric times as burial monuments, for ceremonial and astronomical purposes, and today as backcountry trail markers.

STEVEN GNAM

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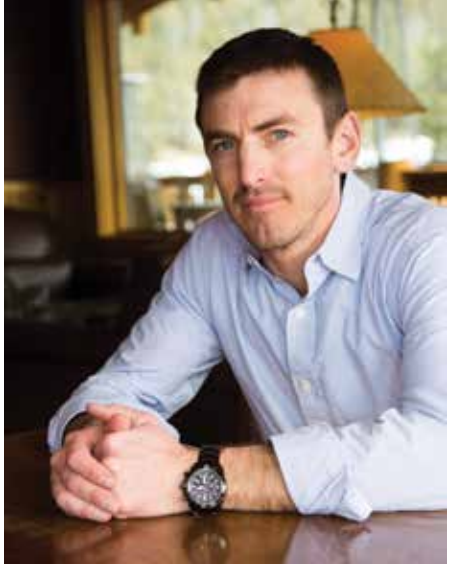

WES OVERVOLD

In early May, as we put the finishing strokes on this 12th edition of *Mountain Outlaw*, an unbelievable thing happened: Climbers in Tibet discovered the body of renowned mountaineer Alex Lowe, who died in a Himalayan avalanche nearly 17 years ago.

This event is surreal in its own right. For us—the tightknit *MO* crew along with the crack team that assembled our cover story, "In the Wake" (p. 74)—this discovery was altogether moving.

"In the Wake" is a collection of resilience stories told by six women whose husbands died pursuing their passions. Alex Lowe's widowed wife, Jennifer Lowe-Anker of Bozeman, Montana, is one of these six women.

Another is Kathy Lynch whose husband, Luke, was killed in an avalanche on Mount Moran in the Tetons a year ago to the day—May 17—that I write this letter. Kathy and Luke are close to the *MO* family, and when Luke died, we were inspired by Kathy's strength in the face of adversity. And this led us to find more stories of resilience.

The discovery of Alex Lowe's body reaffirmed the power and sensitivity of this story—Jenni and her family traveled to Tibet to recover and cremate Alex's body, and receive what they wished one day to find: closure. It reminded me of the important things we too often take for granted. It reinforced hope.

The articles published in this edition of *Mountain Outlaw* share a common thread of hope that weaves through the pages.

You'll read of the things we value and expect you do as well: family ("In the Wake"); the freedom represented by our public lands and those who protect them ("Standing Guard for Yellowstone," p. 58); you'll read of sustainability, jobs and the environment ("Thin Black Line," p. 44).

The production process for "In the Wake," along with the other stories you'll find in this book, serve as a profound reminder of what is truly important. That process woke me at night, the stories reverberating in my head, but also allowed me to reflect on the vital elements in our lives: our spouses, our families, our friends.

We live in a world of doubt and derision. News headlines declare the destruction of our collective system of values, of empathy and of kindness. They distract us from the people and places in our lives that deserve attention; that demand reflection and love. And hope. Hope shines through it all.

Joseph T. O'Connor, Editor
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Over the last two years **ANDREW GRAHAM** has covered energy and land-use issues in Montana, the West and abroad. This spring he earned his master's degree in environmental journalism from the University of Montana in Missoula. ("Thin Black Line," p. 44)

BRIGID MANDER is a skier and a writer based in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Her work regularly appears in publications ranging from *The Ski Journal* to *The Wall Street Journal*. ("In The Wake," p. 74)

A former editor at *Outside, Skiing,* and ESPN.com, **MEGAN MICHELSON** is now a freelance writer who lives in Tahoe City, California. After interviewing three of the exceptionally strong women featured in "In the Wake," (p. 74), about the most profound loss in their lives, she came home and gave her husband and young daughter an extra long squeeze.

EDNOR THERRIAULT is a writer and musician from Missoula, where he performs as "Bob Wire." He frequently travels the state to report on the weird and the curious, favoring cheap motels and dive bars. His books, *Montana Curiosities* and *Montana Off the Beaten Path* are available throughout Montana and online, and his Bob Wire Chronicles humor series can be found at amazon.com. ("A Merman's Tale," p. 111)

L-R: SHANTI JOHNSON, JOHN SLAUGHTER, COURTESY OF MEGAN MICHELSON, SOPHIE THERRIAULT

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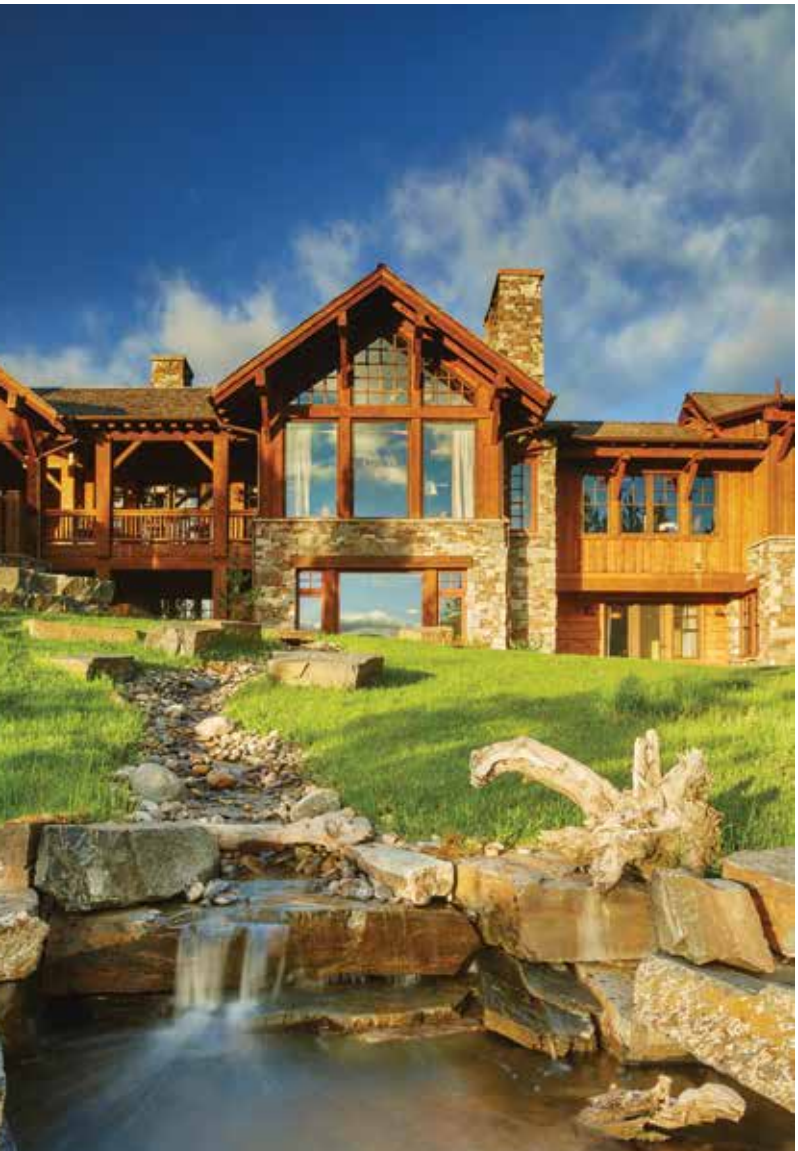

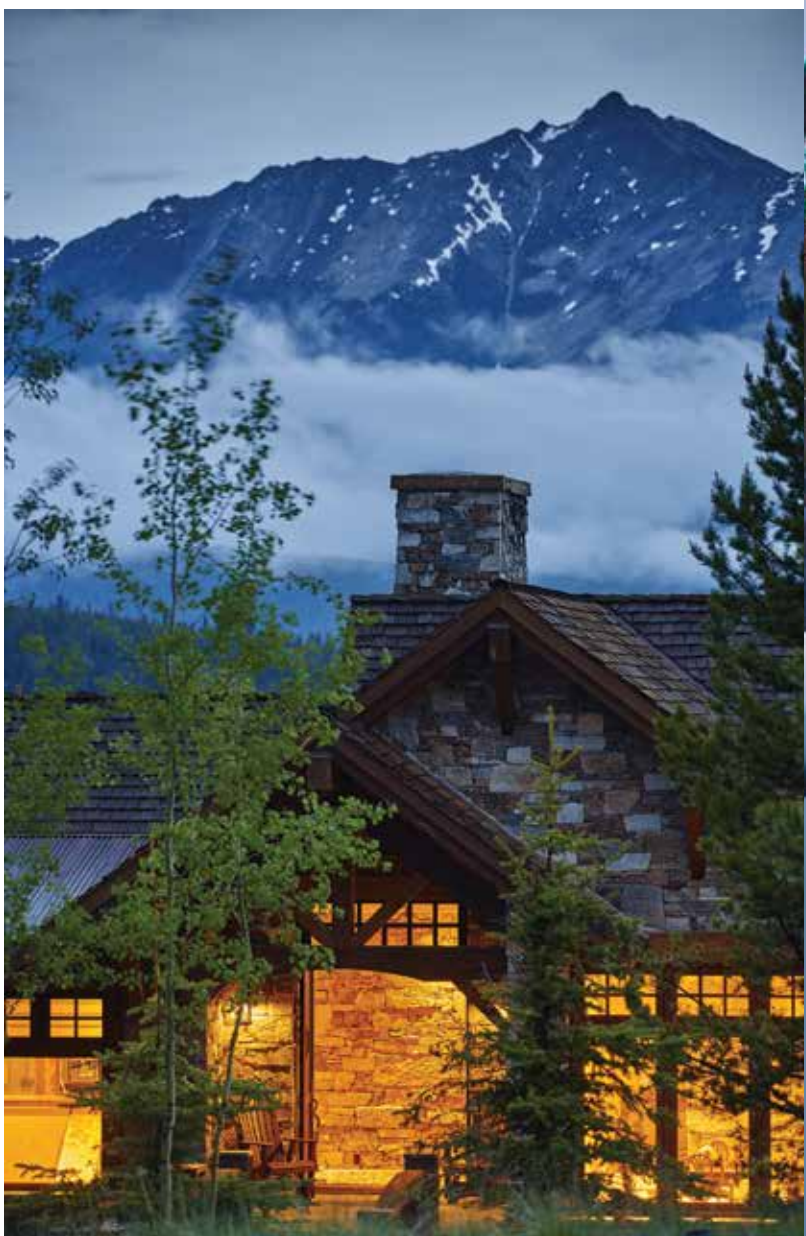

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CALGARY STAMPEDE

JULY 8-17 / CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA

EVENTS

Calgary's nickname is "Cowtown," and it's signature event inspired the name for the local Canadian pro football team, the "Stampeders."

The Calgary Stampede is Alberta's annual rodeo, agricultural exhibition and festival drawing more than 1 million attendees each July. Billing itself as "The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth," this 10-day event includes one of the world's largest rodeos, as well as parades, live music, chuckwagon racing, ag exhibitions, amusement park rides, and plenty of fair-style concessions.

"It's like if Vegas came to town and set up camp in Calgary," said one Stampede witness.

Since 1912, and functioning as a nonprofit event, the Calgary Stampede embodies western culture, heritage and the spirit of community during an unforgettable spectacle of entertainment. *-Taylor-Ann Smith*

THE EVENT AT REBECCA FARM

JULY 21-24 / KALISPELL, MONTANA

"Eventing" is an equestrian triathlon that analyzes the partnership between rider and horse in a series of tests known as dressage, cross-country, and show jumping. Each July, riders and spectators from across the country gather in Kalispell, Montana, to witness the best in horsemanship at The Event at Rebecca Farm.

With more than 10,000 attendees, The Event is the largest equestrian triathlon in the country, and organizers estimate an area economic impact of $4.4 million. Since 2002, the 640-acre Rebecca Farm has hosted four days of equestrian competition, an arts and crafts trade fair, and a broad variety of food concessions.

Donations are collected at parking areas, and proceeds support the "Halt Cancer at X" campaign. Burnish your boots and canter up to this must-see event to witness the spirit of a Montana summer. *-T.A.S.*

COURTESY OF CALGARY STAMPEDE, SHANNON BRINKMAN PHOTOGRAPHY, CINDEE REEDER PHOTOGRAPHY

LOTOJA CLASSIC

SEPTEMBER 10 / LOGAN, UTAH TO JACKSON, WYOMING

What began in 1983 as the dream of a one-day, Euro-style bicycle race in the U.S. has now grown into one of the nation's premier amateur road-bike races.

Designed by Utah-based cyclists David Bern and Jeff Keller, the LoToJa Classic is a test of physical and mental stamina, a 206-mile road race starting in the scenic terrain of Logan, Utah, and ending in the Tetons at the base of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort. Cyclists who compete in the 34th annual LoToJa this September will negotiate three brutal mountain passes in Utah, Idaho and Wyoming, but it's the last one that's the real ass-kicker, a 47-mile grind up "Hoback" to the finish.

LoToJa is the longest one-day USA Cycling-sanctioned bicycle race in the country, and a sought-after event for competitors looking to set records as well as those just hoping to cross the finish line. *– T.A.S.*

HAILEY, IDAHO

VISIT

Within a couple miles of the Sawtooth National Forest and a handful of hot springs, Hailey, Idaho's surrounding landscape is as sharp and stunning as the town is quaint.

Fifty jagged peaks in the nearby Sawtooth Wilderness top out at 10,000 feet or better, and snowmelt feeds into four major watersheds that support all variety of trout: cutthroat, rainbow, golden and brook.

John Hailey founded this small mining town at the foot of a narrow valley south of Ketchum in 1879. He is said to have introduced the first sheep into Wood River Valley, while Scots and Basques filled the ranks of Idaho's first shepherds. By 1918, the sheep population in Idaho reached 2.65 million, surpassing all other sheep centers save for Sydney, Australia's.

Although more robust at the turn of the 20th century, the role of sheep on Idaho's landscape is still celebrated today: 2016 marks the 20th year of the Trailing of the Sheep Festival.

During this three-day jubilee, locals and visitors showcase all things sheep: Feasts of lamb cuisine, wool fiber arts projects, sheepdog trials, and even a sheepherders ball take the stage at various turns. This year's festival is slated for October 6-9, around the time when shepherds traditionally brought their flocks down from high mountain pastures to winter ranges in the Snake River plain of southern Idaho.

Of course, this area was also one of Ernest Hemingway's late haunts; he's buried in a modest grave underneath a stand of towering pines in the nearby Ketchum Cemetery.

– *Amanda Eggert*

CAROL WALLER, JOSH MYERS

CAMP MAK-A-DREAM

CAUSE

For the 400-plus people who will stay at Camp Mak-A-Dream in 2016, the taxing grind familiar to many cancer patients is replaced with a week in a classic Montana landscape.

Set in the foothills of the Pintler Mountains near the Clark Fork river, Camp Mak-A-Dream has given cancer patients and their families a "real Montana experience" for two decades.

Jennifer Benton, a program manager who's been with Camp Mak-A-Dream since its early days, says campers—even adults readily adopt the "camper" moniker—frequently comment on the multitude of stars at their Gold Creek facility. "Just that nighttime sky—it's pretty amazing to some folks," Benton says.

The property's former owners, Harry and Sylvia Granadar, began fundraising to build the campus on the site of their former cattle ranch in 1991, and five years later, 46 kids participated in the first camp. To date, campers from 49 states and six countries have participated in 11 annual sessions, including camps for kids, teens, young adults, siblings of cancer patients, and retreats for women.

Each session is cost-free for campers.

A mix of private donations, grants, fundraising events and memorial funds allows Camp Mak-A-Dream to offer their five-to-seven-day programs free of charge.

Clockwise from top left: Camp Mak-A-Dream is located in the scenic Clark Fork Valley; Campers dress up for theme night; Fishing on a private pond.

Campers who stay at the 87-acre property have access to activities and facilities typical of a summer camp—horseback riding, archery, high-ropes course, overnight campsite, swimming pool and art studio—but Camp Mak-A-Dream also has a new medical facility that allows them to accept people in the midst of cancer treatment.

"If they're well enough to get here, they can come," Benton said.

Cancer patients in Montana—particularly children—have limited options when it comes to medical treatment. Benton said Montana families often move out of state to be closer to pediatric cancer centers.

"The irony of [the camp] being in Montana is that we don't treat cancer for children in this state," Benton said. "So it's nice to have a facility that will serve those folks here at home."

Benton said many campers, volunteers and staffers are so connected to camp that they return for multiple seasons. It's not uncommon for campers who get well to go on to volunteer.

"A lot of people refer to camp as their second home," she said. – *A.E.*

Visit campdream.org for more information about the nonprofit's programs and how you can contribute.

COURTESY OF CAMP MAK-A-DREAM

JIM ECKENRODE

'SOMETHING REAL'

Lukas Nelson and Promise of the Real

RECORD

The words Lukas Nelson and Promise of the Real use to describe their sound—cowboy hippie surf rock—may be as eclectic as the band's collection of influences.

Comprised of drummer Anthony LoGerfo, bassist Corey McCormick, and percussionist Tato Melgar, POTR regularly features Micah, Lukas's younger brother who also grew up influenced by their father Willie's broad range of musical cohorts.

"It would take me a day to list them all," the elder Nelson brother says, opening the roster with his dad and unleashing a string of greats ranging from the Beatles to Stevie Ray Vaughan, Pearl Jam to Neil Young, with whom POTR's toured and collaborated.

That thread of inspiration is woven into the band's March release, *Something Real*, a nine-track album that POTR recorded in the Westerfeld mansion, a San Francisco landmark and one-time residence of the Grateful Dead and Janis Joplin.

"I felt [recording there] really captured that San Francisco spirit that was lingering in this old house," Nelson says. "It wanted to have a voice."

As a politically active musician who's played an untold number of benefit concerts, Nelson finds resonance with the ideals of that generation.

"I like to stand up for the planet I live on," he says. – *A.E.*

As part of the Professional Bull Riders event this summer, Lukas Nelson and POTR will be returning to Big Sky to play Music in the Mountains at Town Center Park on Thursday, July 28.

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Vertical Harvest: Small space making big impact

BY **KATE HULL**

TUCKED IN DOWNTOWN JACKSON, WYOMING, on a tenth-of-an-acre plot adjacent to the town's parking garage, a three-story glass building home to Vertical Harvest is changing the landscape of hydroponic farming.

Inside the unassuming 13,500-square-foot building, microgreens, spinach, lettuce and herbs make their way up two floors on vertical conveyor-belt carousels absorbing both natural and artificial light and collecting nutrients from a drip irrigation system that is then recirculated, allowing for the use of less water. On the third floor, heirloom tomatoes soak up sunrays through the glass ceiling as they grow to nearly 30 feet. Bees inside the greenhouse buzz around the tomatoes, pollinating each plant in turn.

Nona Yehia, Vertical Harvest's chief executive officer and building architect, hoped to design a beautiful workspace that the public would want to visit, while keeping energy usage and its carbon footprint as low as possible. Construction on the once-vacant lot began in December 2014 and was completed in early 2016. The result: a building that accounted for Jackson's climate, altitude and location while remaining aesthetically pleasing.

This three-story greenhouse will soon generate 100,000 pounds of produce annually to sell to the area resorts, school district, hospitals, local restaurants, and grocery stores, and won't compete with local farmers markets, Yehia says. Vertical Harvest will yield as much produce as a 5-acre traditional farm.

The recirculated irrigation water eliminates the need for soil by delivering high-mineral and nutrient solutions to the plants. This method uses 90 percent less water than traditional farming, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Heating pipes, the greenhouse's first line of defense, surround the interior glass walls and stretch across the glass ceiling carrying 180 F water to fight Jackson's frigid winter temperatures (the average low in January is 5 F). Piped water, however, was rarely necessary this past season thanks to relatively mild outdoor temperatures and warm sunlight beaming through the glass windows. The town of Jackson mandates a snow load criteria of 125 pounds per square foot, but glass can only support up to 75 pounds. The heating pipes ensure snow never accumulates.

"The architecture really works as an ecosystem," Yehia said. "Only the first floor is heated, so as you go up, heat rises."

Everything came together at the right time with the right people. Yehia and Penny McBride, now the company's chief operating officer and sustainability guru, met eight years ago at a bachelorette party. Timing and ingenuity collided.

"We wanted to employ as many people as possible, and grow as much food as possible and do both year round," Yehia said. And, it's working. Soon, 15 employees will share 140 work hours each week.

Yehia and McBride partnered with Caroline Croft Estay, a case manager and advocate for adults with developmental and cognitive disabilities.

The three-story, 13,500 square-foot hydroponic greenhouse was built on a tenth-of-an-acre plot in downtown Jackson. Inside, fresh lettuce and tomatoes will grow all year, despite Wyoming's harsh climate.

ALEXANDER HERRING

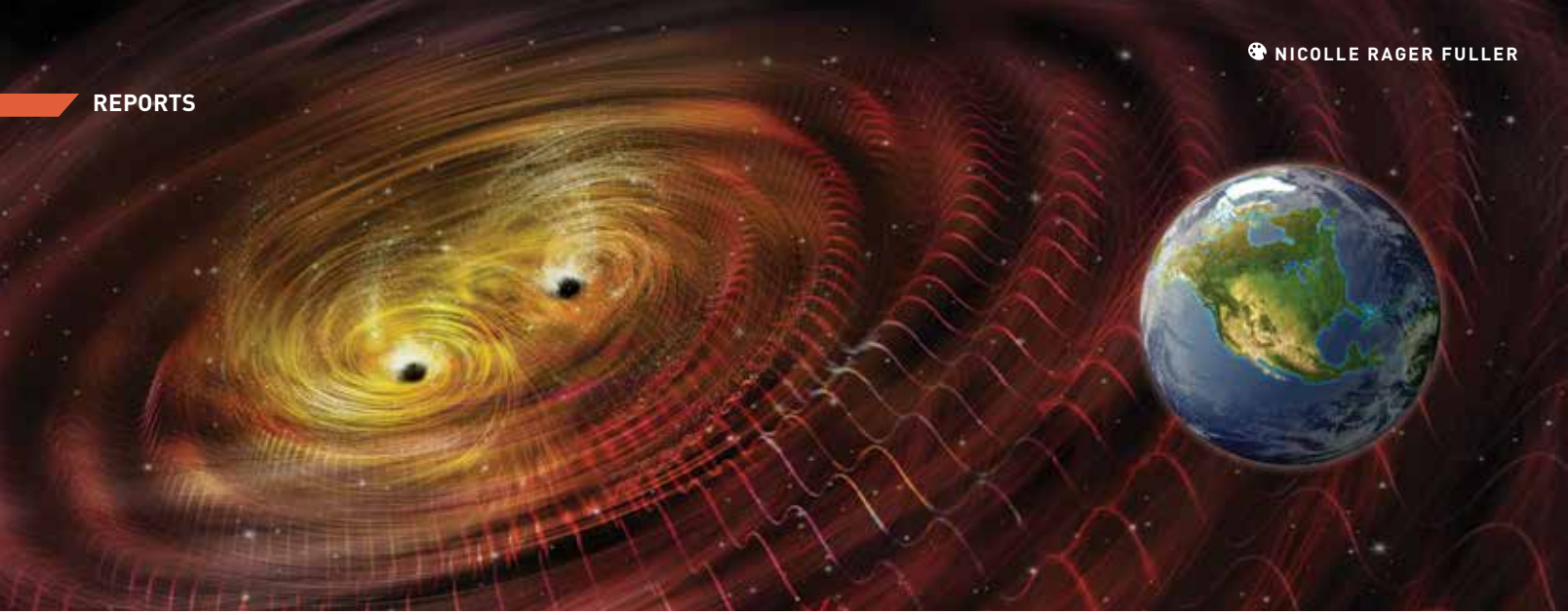
Above: The Vertical Harvest team perfected the tomato and lettuce crops this spring, and plans to sell to Jackson area grocery stores and restaurants this summer. Each year, the greenhouse will produce 100,000 pounds of produce.

Below: Inside Vertical Harvest, produce thrives. Carousels carry lettuce, herbs and mixed greens up two floors as they soak up natural and artificial light, and collect nutrients through drip irrigation.

In Wyoming, statistics show that more than half of employable residents with disabilities currently are jobless. Together, the team created a business model that allows for meaningful employment for the economically disadvantaged. After ample training, the staff members are hydroponic farmers.

This summer, Vertical Harvest will welcome its first official growing season. Stop by and gander at the public atrium to experience the farming techniques. You can also skip to the final product by perusing the market store where some of the produce will be sold, along with artisanal goods and gifts.

A Texas native, Kate Hull lives in Teton Valley's Victor, Idaho, where she works as a freelance travel and lifestyle writer, and as the marketing coordinator at Grand Targhee Resort.



NICOLLE RAGER FULLER

Gravitational waves reveal Montana's unlikely twin

BY **JANA WIEGAND**

AROUND 1.3 BILLION YEARS AGO, two black holes collided and released enough energy to vaporize the sun three times over. That energy created ripples in the four-dimensional space-time fabric of the universe, changing not just the shape of space, but of time itself. Known as gravitational waves, these ripples finally reached Earth on September 14, 2015 at 3:51 a.m. MST, stretching and squeezing the planet in their wake. You just didn't notice.

ABOVE: An artist's rendition of two black holes spiraling toward each other—their movement sending gravitational waves across the space-time fabric of the universe.

In seven milliseconds, the waves had passed through Earth and moved on. But the impact in the scientific community worldwide was extraordinary; the event finally proved a theory set in place 100 years ago by Albert Einstein. Published in 1916, Einstein's Theory of General Relativity predicted the existence of gravitational waves, a concept that helps explain how the universe works.

The only disturbance on Earth was registered by a set of twin laser beams used by the research collaboration LIGO, which stands for the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory.

LIGO's team operates detection facilities in Livingston, Louisiana and Hanford, Washington, in hopes of catching gravitational waves in action. Secured in 2.5-mile-long vacuum chambers, the lasers measure the size and frequency of gravitational waves as they move through space and time.

Neil Cornish, an astrophysicist and gravity expert at Montana State University, builds models of gravitational waves and collaborated with LIGO using computer programs to see if the observatory's data matched his predictions.

Gravitational waves, Cornish says, are like the ultimate X-ray vision allowing scientists to observe mass moving through space. "They take you right to the center of the action."

Only an extreme event could have produced these particular waves, and Cornish found that the data matched what would happen if two black holes merged.

The black holes were rotating at about 100 times per second right before they collided and became one. During a press conference following the historic discovery, famed American astrophysicist Kip Thorne put the collision into context. Sort of.

"The total power output in gravitational waves during the brief collision of these black holes was 50 times greater than all of the power put out by all of the stars of the universe put together," Thorne explained.

Yet, like the ripples caused from a stone's splash into a pond, the size of the gravitational waves dissipated as they moved away. By the time the waves reached our solar system, the largest ripple had just enough power to alter the distance between Earth and the sun by the width of an atom.

The black hole is now 1.3 billion years old and sits calmly in space, harboring the mass of 62 suns within roughly the same surface area as Montana: 147,164 square miles.

With the action over, it won't send any more gravitational waves toward Earth. However, now scientists have physical proof that black holes exist.

The detection of gravitational waves made headlines around the world, and according to multiple news outlets the discovery is likely to garner a Nobel Prize in Physics this October. But with more than 1,000 scientists around the globe involved in the collaboration, the biggest question might be: Who gets the ultimate recognition?

Jana Wiegand is pursuing a master's degree in environmental science and natural resource journalism at the University of Montana. She enjoys earth sciences, astronomy and exploring the diverse landscapes of the West.

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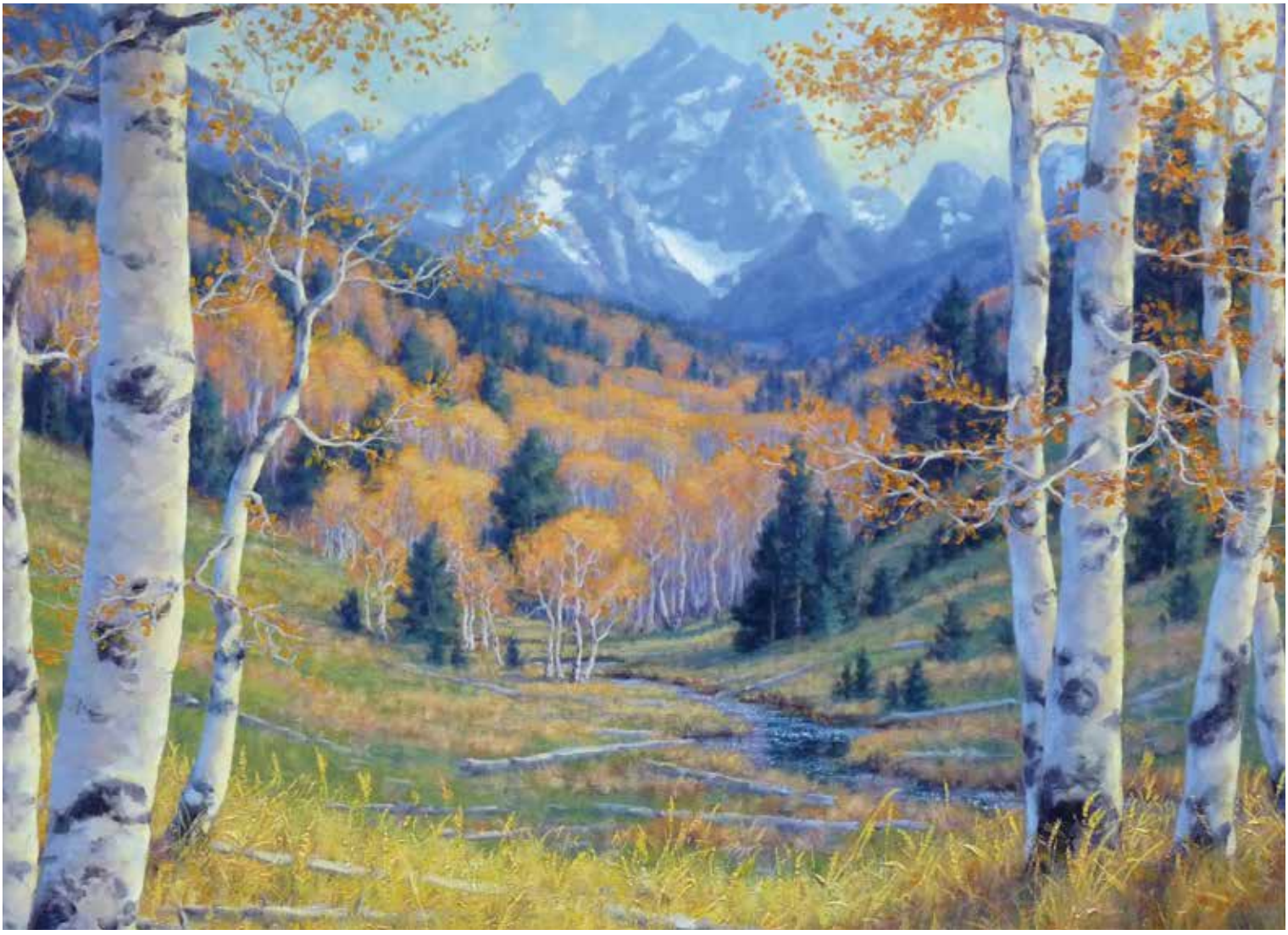

"Autumn in the Tetons," Oil on Canvas, 30 x 40

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H2O WATER

Water is the most precious resource on the planet, covering 71 percent of the Earth's surface. In an age where we must preserve this treasure more than ever, we need constant reminders. Dozens of artists submitted their depictions of water. Here are our favorites.

Kayaker Ben Marr paddles 'The Ruins' on the Ottawa River.
PATRICK CAMBLIN

During the height of the last ice age, glaciers covered about 32 percent of the total land area on Earth. Presently, 10 percent of the planet's land area is covered with glacial ice.

"Global Warming" acrylic on canvas, 2015 **IUNA TINTA**

SOURCES: NATIONAL SNOW AND ICE DATA CENTER, FLATHEAD LAKE BIOLOGICAL STATION

Flathead Lake, in Montana's northwest corner, is the largest freshwater lake in the contiguous U.S. by surface area, and one of the cleanest in the world.

Model: Amelia Beard, Flathead Lake, Montana

JENNA MARTIN

783 million people worldwide do not have access to clean and safe water.

WHO/UNICEF JOINT MONITORING PROGRAMME FOR WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION.

The Grasses of Calvin TERI EGTS

Mayfly nymphs spend up to three years living in water. In their adult stage they live anywhere from two minutes to two days, just long enough to reproduce.

Baetis Mayfly, Gallatin River, Montana **MIKE CHILCOAT**

FS.USDA.GOV, BUGFACTS.NET/MAYFLY.PHP

In 1914, U.S. Forest Service officials sent grasshopper specimens from the Grasshopper Glacier to the U.S. Bureau of Entomology for study. Scientists estimated the grasshoppers had been extinct for 200 years.

Grasshopper Glacier and lakes, Beartooth Mountains **RHYAN MCLAURY**

The volume of water flowing over the Lower Falls in Yellowstone National Park can vary from 5,000 to 63,500 gallons per second.

Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River from Artist's Point

KRETA CHANDLER POTTER

MONTANA'S **HIGHEST SCENIC OVERLOOK**

LONE PEAK EXPEDITION: TRAM TO 11,166FT

Ride to 11,166ft

Photos: Michel Tallichet, Crystal Images

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THIN BLACK LINE

POLITICS AND TOUGH CHOICES CONSUME A MONTANA COAL TOWN. AS THE OUTSIDE WORLD PUSHES FOR CLEANER ENERGY, COLSTRIP PUSHES BACK.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **ANDREW GRAHAM**

ON A LATE FEBRUARY EVENING, cars and pickup trucks fill the high school parking lot in Colstrip, Montana, as local residents arrive for a town hall meeting. With two main employers in this town of 2,300—a coal mine and the power plant that burns its product—everyone knows everyone. Camaraderie is high, but today morale, perhaps, is less so.

Before entering the high school auditorium there are two papers to sign. One list is for attendance, signature requested; the other is for those who'd consider joining a class-action lawsuit, signature optional. "Somebody tossed out the idea that if all of us owned a bunch of houses that are worth zero, we might want to try this," the man taking signatures explains.

The measure is preemptive—it's early days yet—but residents in Colstrip have a right to be concerned about property values. The town's livelihood is based wholly on coal, and the picture for coal is not looking good.

By the time Duane Ankney steps up to speak, the auditorium is nearly two-thirds full. Ankney's been Colstrip's Republican state senator for two years, and served in the Montana House of Representatives for eight years before that. With a thick walrus mustache and self-pride in being a "straight shooter," Ankney pulls no punches with reporters or his constituents. He starts tonight's speech by wishing out loud that he could have been senator in the 1990s. It's a nostalgia he's repeated elsewhere. "I wish it were 20 years ago," Ankney said in a recent speech, "when we worried about getting coal from point A to B." Before politics Ankney spent 34 years mining coal, retiring as a superintendent from Colstrip's Rosebud mine.

L: The Colstrip power plant is made up of four units. Units 1 and 2, the older green ones in the foreground, face potential closure as the result of a bill in Washington state.

R: Duane Ankney, state senator from Colstrip, Montana.

But while Colstrip was busy mining and burning coal, "groups were already working against us," Ankney tells the crowd. His speech does not mention competition from low natural gas prices or the struggling export market for coal, but instead describes powerful political forces bent on coal's destruction. And Colstrip's.

"None of these groups, none of them, are a friend of the working man and woman. They are your enemy. They'll take your job and they'll take the food off your table," Ankney says, referring chiefly to the Sierra Club and the Montana Environmental Information Center. Both environmental groups supported the passage of a recent Washington state Senate bill, SB 6248, which carries a poignant threat to Colstrip's livelihood.

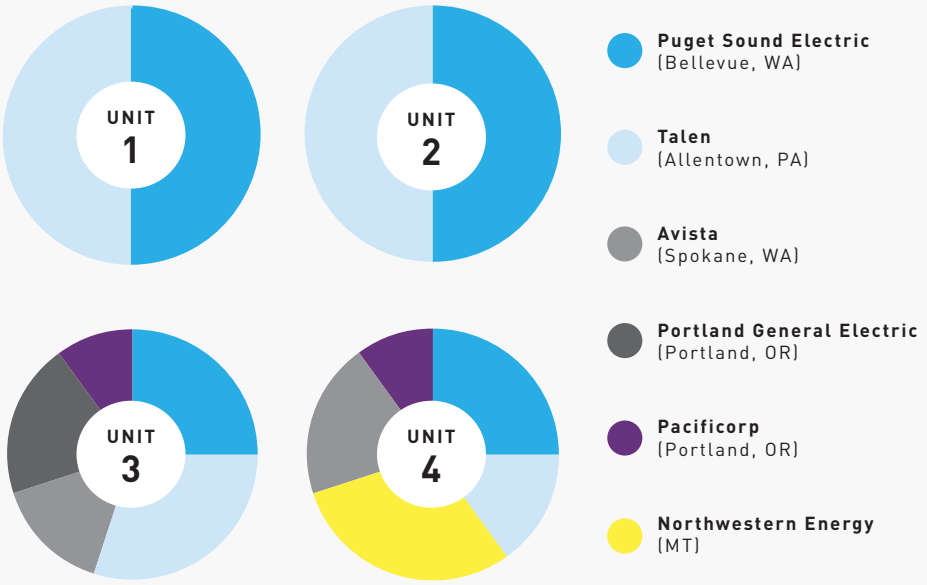
The power plant here is made up of four energy-generating units, and only a fraction of one unit is owned by a Montana utility. The vast majority of the ownership rests out of state and thus largely out of the hands of Montana lawmakers like Ankney. The Washington bill allows state utility Puget Sound Electric—which owns half of units 1 and 2—to begin planning for those units' closure. SB 6248 sailed through both houses of Congress and was signed into law April 1 by Washington Governor Jay Inslee, despite Montana Governor Steve Bullock asking him to veto it. Both governors are Democrats. >>

A THREATENED WAY OF LIFE

THE U.S. ENERGY INFORMATION AGENCY PREDICTS that 2016 will be the first year energy from coal-fired power plants will be surpassed by energy from natural gas on the nation's electric grid. The price of coal has fallen 62 percent since 2011, and Peabody Coal, the largest private-sector coal company in the world, filed for U.S. bankruptcy protection in April. Nationally, coal country is feeling the trend, and Montana has not been spared. Arch Coal, facing bankruptcy, announced in March that it would suspend a long-running application for a large strip mine and close its Billings, Montana office. The Bull Mountain coal mine, north of Colstrip, laid off 20 percent of its employees in December, and owners worry about further financial turmoil.

Entrance to the Colstrip power plant

COLSTRIP OWNERSHIP



Washington state is also reacting to a global desire to shift away from fossil fuels. Last December, President Obama joined 200 other countries when he committed the U.S. to deep carbon cuts at the United Nation's climate change summit in Paris. As the state's biggest single carbon emitter, Colstrip became front and center of the discussion as Montana considered the steep emissions cuts mandated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan, a cornerstone of meeting Obama's global commitment.

In early February, when the U.S. Supreme Court ordered a controversial stay on the Clean Power Plan, it seemed to spell an end to that particular threat to Colstrip. Then, later that month, conservative Justice Antonin Scalia died, leaving the court split ideologically, and a majority ruling against the EPA far from inevitable. The Clean Power Plan, though stalled, remains on the table with its next court hearing coming in June, after this magazine went to press.

During the town hall meeting Ankney wears a blazer and stiff white cowboy hat, but a few hours earlier he sported a jean shirt and baseball cap, looking road-weary as he sipped coffee and greeted fellow patrons in the Colstrip Subway restaurant. Although he's not happy about it, Ankney says he's confident that one way or another, "we're gonna get a goddamn Clean Power Plan." At the moment, however, he's focused on Puget Sound Energy and units 1 and 2. He was on the road lobbying for more worker protection provisions before the bill passed, crisscrossing Montana and traveling once to Olympia to testify before the Washington Senate. Now he's looking for a way the plants could keep running without the Washington utility.

He worries about the younger workers, far from a pensioned retirement, who may have to leave Colstrip if jobs dry up. They face rougher transitions than Ankney's generation. "I could just sit out there on that place of mine and shoot wild turkeys," he says. Young people who have invested in the town by buying homes and starting families face the loss of stability, not just a way of life.

Two such young residents, Ashley Dennehy and Lori Shaw, are rising to the occasion via online activism. They started a Facebook page and then a website for an organization called Colstrip United. The goal, Shaw said, was first to organize the town politically, but has now widened to informing the outside world and fighting "the lies and ignorance surrounding coal with positivity and solid facts," according to their mission statement.

Their rhetoric can be fierce. The following quote, on both Colstrip United's website and Facebook page, defines how they see their struggle:

"The people of this city are not going to just roll over and resign themselves to being the newest victims of short-sighted anti-coal agendas. Organizations like the Sierra Club and the MEIC (Montana Environmental Information Center) don't care about who they hurt as long as they get their way. No amount of human damage would make these radical groups see the error of their ways."

Shaw says images of Colstrip smokestacks on cloudy days that mimic smog are one example of the misinformation she hopes to combat. The Sierra Club does indeed have such an advertisement, circulating Seattle on hybrid-electric busses. "Dirty coal from Montana or clean energy from Washington?" it asks, depicting Colstrip smokestacks on a dirty white background next to images of wind turbines framed by a clear blue sky.

The smoke from Colstrip's stacks is visible from well outside town, at least during peak energy-use hours on colder mornings. By midafternoon on the day of Ankney's meeting, however, the visible output was down to a puff from just one stack, like that emanating from the smoldering tip of a cigar. Montana's big sky was as blue as the clean energy portion of the Sierra Club ad.

Lori Shaw is 24 years old and worried she'll lose her home. People think Colstrip is comprised of a wealthy older population, which couldn't be further from the truth, she says. Shaw grew up in Colstrip, and met her husband Walt when he moved there for high school. Walt, 26, works as an accountant for the coal mine, which has one customer: the Colstrip power plant. "If the two units get shut down, he's a low-level employee, he'll probably have to go," Shaw says. The two are concerned about keeping up with their mortgage, finding themselves unable to plan for a future knowing the town that they grew up and invested in could dry up.

It's easy to see why the Shaws would want to stay. The rolling prairie leading into Colstrip gives way south of town to a badlands country of canyons and sandstone buttes. There is peace and quiet here, and sunsets worth settling in for.

In Rosebud County where 20 percent of people live below the poverty line, Colstrip's median household income is around $75,000. Proceeds from coal have paid for a parks and trails system, top-notch schools and a golf course residents can use for free. In 2004, *Sports Illustrated* named it Montana's best sports town for its commitment to recreation and school athletics. The high school wrestling team's state championship in February is still a ready topic for conversation. More recently, Colstrip was named the safest town in the state, based on an evaluation of crime statistics for cities with populations over 1,500. But 80 percent of the town's jobs come from the plant and mine, and without coal there's no economic reason for the town to exist. Not currently, anyway.

In the Clean Power Plan, the EPA projects that reducing CO2 will result in benefits of $25 billion to $45 billion by 2030. But that is on a national and even global scale, after taking into account the many ways in which unchecked global warming could affect public health and productivity. The damage something like the Clean Power Plan or Washington state's SB 6248 will have on Colstrip carries much higher visibility in a regional political fight.

It's an election year, and Montana Republican Greg Gianforte is running for his party's nomination against sitting Governor Steve Bullock in November. Gianforte has used energy issues to paint Bullock as a job-killer, and associate him with Obama's "war on coal." On March 14, Gianforte held a press conference about the importance of Colstrip to Montana's economy. Flanking him for effect were the girls of Colstrip United. >>

“THE PEOPLE OF THIS CITY ARE NOT GOING TO JUST ROLL OVER AND RESIGN THEMSELVES TO BEING THE NEWEST VICTIMS OF SHORT-SIGHTED ANTI-COAL AGENDAS.”

THE POWER PLAY

ULTIMATELY, THE WASHINGTON UTILITIES COMMISSION WILL DECIDE if and when Units 1 and 2 at Colstrip will be decommissioned. The Washington bill simply allows Puget Sound Electric to begin saving money to pay the costs of closing units 1 and 2, which the utility estimates could cost as much as $195 million. Originally, the bill said PSE's fund could not be accessed until December 31, 2022, but Governor Inslee vetoed that section.

There won't be any final decisions coming this year, though; the Washington utilities commission postponed hearings on the matter until 2017.

A more pressing question may be Talen Energy, a Pennsylvania-based company that runs the plant's day-to-day operations for all other owners, and also owns the other half of units 1 and 2. Given pending regulations and the low price of natural gas, Talen currently has little to gain from its stake in Colstrip, according to a recent report from the financial services company UBS Securities.

While evaluating all possibilities, Talen remains focused on running the plant, said company spokesman Todd Martin. "What we won't do is lose that focus or expend resources speculating on what comes next," he said. "It's simply premature." Talen will not discuss business decisions in the press, he added, a strategy consistent with the company's guarded nature in media outlets since Colstrip started making news with the Clean Power Plan.

But others speculate that Talen, which is a private company and not a state-regulated utility like PSE, is looking to pull out of Colstrip. As evidence they point to a failed 2013 effort by Talen to sell its Colstrip assets to Northwestern Energy.

Two such people are well aware their advice is likely unwelcome in Colstrip. Enter Doug Howell, a campaign representative from the Sierra Club, and Anne Hedges, lead lobbyist of the Montana Environmental Information Center.

They say that Talen is the more unreliable partner, and as a private company could walk away at any time without the strict cleanup responsibilities that the Washington legislature has mandated to PSE. Both Howell and Hedges think the Washington bill is about as good a deal as Colstrip will get, given the overarching picture for coal.

"I think everybody feels now that the retirement for Colstrip 1 and 2 is inevitable, and it's the traditional economics that are driving that," Howell says.

The Sierra Club started looking at how Washington state could exit the plant four or five years ago, according to Howell. Although he couches the PSE bill as an economic decision to protect Washington ratepayers, the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign has claimed responsibility for shuttering coal power plants and blocking new ones across the country. The organization makes no secret that its end goal is to take coal off the nation's electrical grid.

"There's no way that you can be responsible for all your climate emissions in Washington unless you look at the power you're importing into the state," Howell says.

Coal power makes up around 14 percent of Washington's energy portfolio, and half of that coal energy comes from Montana. The rest currently is derived from the Transalta coal plant in Centralia, Washington, which is also on its way out. Howell thinks that's somewhere Colstrip could look to see how a coal town can transition away from a one-horse economy. "We want to take care of the Colstrip workers," he says.

The first unit in Centralia is slated to go offline by 2020, with the second shutting down five years later as the result of a deal between Transalta, environmentalists and labor unions. Transalta invested $55 million into a transition fund for Centralia. Twenty million will go to education and retraining coal workers, while the other $35 million will support the development of clean energy and energy efficiency projects. Meanwhile, the company is looking for opportunities to transition the coal plants to natural gas, whose methane emissions are also a potent greenhouse gas, but not yet in the crosshairs of those advocating action on climate change.

If those in Colstrip aren't proactive, Howell says, Talen could exit stage right with no transition strategy. And that could leave workers abruptly out of jobs and without an established cleanup plan.

MEIC's Anne Hedges, too, would like to see a planned transition in Montana. An opportunity exists for new electricity sources in Colstrip, she says. "The wind blows out there, [and] they have transmission lines."

Although Hedges herself can be fiery in the press, she says the politically heated rhetoric is unfortunate, which in the long run may block Colstrip residents from finding the smoothest path forward.

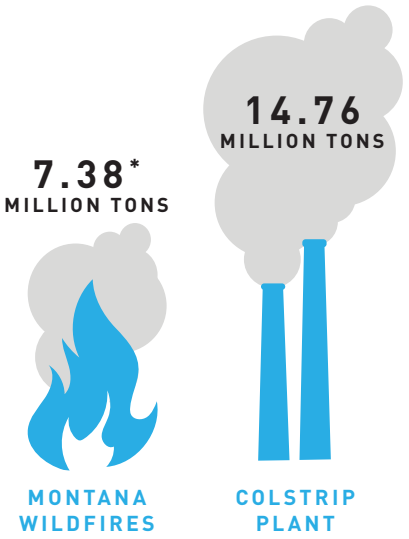
"I think Duane Ankney is harming more than he's helping, because he's not giving them a realistic perspective on the state of affairs," she says.

Colstrip residents need someone they can trust to begin a conversation about how to best create a long-term transition to a new, more diversified economy, Hedges says. She knows that person can't be her, or "anybody who has been working in climate change."

> "I THINK EVERYBODY FEELS NOW THAT THE RETIREMENT FOR COLSTRIP 1 AND 2 IS INEVITABLE, AND IT'S THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMICS THAT ARE DRIVING THAT."

The Colstrip power plant stacks, seen from just south of town.

ANNUAL C02 EMISSIONS



*Data based on 2012 wildfire season, one of the worst in recent years.

People in the town, including Ankney, are largely skeptical about climate change. They like to compare carbon emissions from the power plant to those from Montana's summer forest fires, in order to make a point about coal concerns being overblown. A statistic on the Colstrip United website says it would take the plant in Colstrip more than 1,600 years to release as many particulate emissions as one season of Montana wildfires.

But particulate emissions are essentially smoke, says David Klemp, and are not the same as CO2. Klemp, who heads the Air Resources Bureau of the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, says he also heard a claim that power plants would take more than 100 years to emit as much CO2 as a summer of forest fires, but wanted to test the theory.

Klemp's department took data from the 2012 wildfire season, one of the worst in recent years, and compared it to Colstrip emissions for CO2. That year the four units of the power plant released 14.76 million tons of CO2. The DEQ is still missing wildfire data for October, but so far found that the 2012 season emitted just under half the CO2 of Colstrip. Even with the October data, Klemp says, wildfire CO2 emissions from a devastating fire year won't come anywhere close to what Colstrip burns annually.

Washington's bill 6248 offers a good starting point for transitioning the town away from coal, Hedges says, adding that the cleanup and environmental reclamation process will keep jobs in Colstrip even if units 1 and 2 get turned off. "Aren't we happy that somebody's going to have funding to clean this place up?" she asks. >>

> **... I'M NOT GONNA APOLOGIZE TO ANYBODY FOR THE WAY WE MAKE A LIVING.**

Not in Colstrip they aren't. "One positive would be to get Washington the hell out of Montana," Ankney said to rousing applause during the town hall meeting. He feels betrayed by the Washington state legislators, whom he's been meeting with since last summer. He asked for provisions that would more directly protect Colstrip workers, including a $55 million fund similar to Centralia's. The bill, however, focuses on decommissioning and remediation costs, and does not specify funds for retraining workers.

Ankney is clearly a man in the fight of his life. Together with ally Jim Keane, a Montana senator from Butte, Ankney's been hoping to drum up new customers to replace PSE. "He's put a lot of miles on his car," says Keane, a Democrat who spent 11 years in Colstrip with the mine engineers' labor union. "Frankly, so have I."

Given the lack of provisions for workers in SB 6248, the two senators are exploring the possibility of legal action against Puget Sound Energy. "Senator Ankney and I are very certain—you want to do this to us, there's going to be one hell of a price to pay," Keane says.

Recently, Montana's Governor Steve Bullock echoed the call to keep the units open no matter what PSE and Talen do. After Washington's governor signed the bill, Bullock called for the creation of a committee on Colstrip, with the goal of exploring "alternative ownership" to keep the plant running and its jobs open.

"We're concerned about the community, the citizens, and the jobs. This process will ultimately help develop a strategy to make sure that any impact on the community is minimal," Bullock said in an April interview with *Mountain Outlaw*. "But we also need to be looking at our overall energy future." Solar and wind energy both have high potential in Montana, he added, and hydroelectric energy currently plays a strong role in the state's energy portfolio.

Although some of Bullock's decisions seem inconsistent—such as calling for action on climate change while also supporting the lawsuit against the Clean Power Plan—the governor said the choice of burning coal versus arresting climate change was a false one, citing future technologies that could burn coal in a cleaner fashion or trap the carbon emissions. He'd like Montana to be at the forefront of developing those technologies, although the details of how are still vague. Bullock cited possible cooperation with the U.S. Department of Energy as well as energy programs at Montana State University in Bozeman. He also pointed out that although the Clean Power Plan set steep targets for Montana, 30 percent of the nation's energy portfolio remains in coal.

"Tomorrow is going to look different than today, and I'd much rather try to put Montana in the driver's seat ... than completely be reliant on companies in Pennsylvania and [elsewhere]," Bullock said.

TIPPING POINT

DRIVING SOUTH DOWN EMPTY HIGHWAY 39 the first signs of Colstrip, before the smoke begins to show over the ridge, are long lines of empty, aging boxcars curving out of sight along the tracks. The town hasn't shipped coal since 2005, but it used to deliver to Minnesota, Wisconsin and other population centers around the West.

It's an old Montana story—the product is here but the buying power is elsewhere. Duane Ankney knows it, Dick Barrett and Anne Hedges know it, and Jim Keane from Butte, Montana, once the richest copper mining town in America, certainly knows it.

Colstrip and Montana can either take a pragmatic look at its future as an energy producer, Hedges says, or "let other people decide what the energy system will look like and hope for scraps."

Ankney, too, wants his town's destiny within its own hands. "I'm not ready to give up," he said toward the end of his February speech, his coal miner's voice rasping with emotion. "And I'm not gonna apologize to anybody for the way we make a living."

Meanwhile, life in Colstrip goes on and the plant continues to burn at full capacity whenever it's needed. On a brilliant Thursday earlier this year the sky is clear blue and the town is quiet, hard at work. The labor union at the power plant is preparing to renegotiate at the end of a four-year contract. Business as usual.

At the mine, huge excavators called draglines clear loose earth from above black coal seams. As the battle over Montana's energy future wages on, the plant still needs coal. Every five minutes it burns 100 tons, the equivalent load of one abandoned boxcar.

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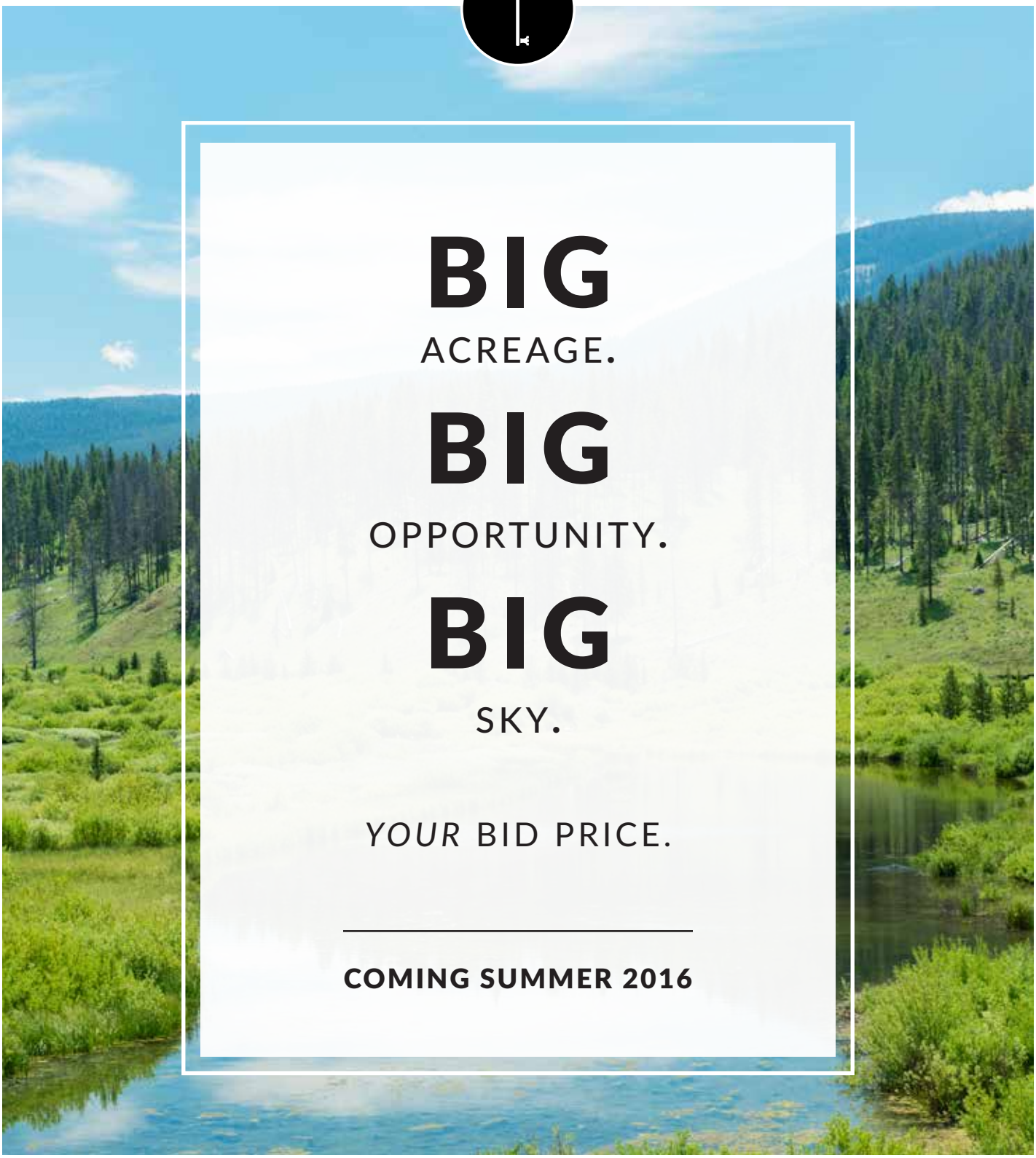

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REIMAGINING THE WESTERN TOWN

As cities build out at breakneck speeds, developer Doug Burgum and architect Brian Caldwell look to vibrant downtowns as ways to build community from the inside out.

BY **TYLER ALLEN**

The 1862 Homestead Act promised 160 acres of public property to settlers willing to stake their dreams on Western migration and by 1900 the act had led to the distribution of 80 million acres of federal land. The West was transformed.

Yet the U.S. government also had the foresight to reserve vast expanses of frontier in national parks, wilderness areas and national forests, securing protected lands for all Americans in perpetuity.

Today, however, public lands in the Rocky Mountains are feeling the burden as surrounding communities grow rapidly, applying unprecedented pressure on these spaces. Few examples better reflect this than Bozeman, Montana.

This university town, the population nexus of southwest Montana's Gallatin County, is seeing explosive growth. The county holds more than 100,000 residents and if current trends persist that number will double by 2040.

The attraction to Bozeman, like other Western mountain towns, is clear. Exceptional skiing and mountain biking, blue-ribbon fly fishing, and abundant open space to view or hunt wildlife are just a few of the opportunities spurring a modern migration to this part of the country.

But unchecked outward growth risks jeopardizing the very open spaces, wildlife corridors and unfettered opportunities for solitude that draw the contemporary American pioneer to the new American West.

If Bozeman fails to maintain the qualities that draw new settlers—and keep the old—it could risk becoming another Denver by the turn of the next century. Some developers are looking to other models for answers: a way to build from the inside out.

Nearly 700 miles to the east of Bozeman, one city is being reimagined with vitality in mind. Sitting on the banks of the Red River and known as the "Gateway to the West," Fargo, North Dakota, is experiencing a resurgence in its historic downtown led by the efforts of Doug Burgum and the Kilbourne Group.

As chairman and CEO of Great Plains Software, Burgum steered the growth of the small startup software company to its $1.1 billion acquisition by Microsoft Corporation in 2001. He served as the tech giant's vice president until 2007 and in 2006 founded Kilbourne Group, driven by the motto "Vibrant downtowns create healthy, smart cities."

Burgum is also running an outsider's campaign to be North Dakota's next Republican governor. With a shock of wavy silver hair and browline glasses, Burgum brings an academic appearance to reining in state spending and advocating local control of government. That platform is informed by his unique experience with public perception as an executive and developer.

Burgum's first experience with urban renewal came in 2000, when he stepped in to rescue the 70,000-square-foot Northern School Supply building from demolition. >>

DAN FRANCIS

Fargo, North Dakota's downtown is experiencing a renaissance thanks to the efforts of Kilbourne Group and its founder Doug Burgum.

North Dakota State University moved its architecture and art programs into the formerly rundown warehouse rechristened Renaissance Hall, and Burgum saw the potential of downtown Fargo anchored by students and young professionals at its heart.

Others see this potential, too. In a March 2016 online column titled "Take it from a Fargo oldster: What's new will be nostalgia," Steve Stark writes about the transformation of downtown Fargo. He calls Burgum's renovation of the Northern School Supply building a "stunning rebirth" and welcomes readers to this new era he dubs "Fargo A.D. (After Doug)."

"[Burgum's] buildings and restorations have vaulted us into A.D.," Stark wrote. "More progressive ideas, buildings and people followed."

Mandan, North Dakota native Angela Renner saw this transformation firsthand. In 2003, she spent a year studying at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota—just across the Red River from Fargo—and returned for a year in 2012 as an emergency room nurse at Sanford Medical Center Fargo.

"I don't know why it happened [in Fargo]," Renner said, noting the influx of young professionals, the walkability of downtown and ubiquitous bike paths. "People are happy being in Fargo. They are staying there and making it the community they want it to be."

It's just the trend Burgum's trying to capture.

"Part of the way cities grow is that you attract and retain workforce—people [who] want to live here," Burgum said, pointing to a cultural shift in those entering and mobilizing within the workforce. When he left school, Burgum says it was all about finding a desirable company and moving wherever a position opened up. Today's college graduates often choose places they'd like to live first then look for jobs.

"The economic development folks are starting to figure it out, and it's not about recruiting companies it's about creating great places for people to live. When we're on a mission to create vibrant downtowns we're basically driving this workforce concept for the whole city," Burgum said.

Infill projects have economic benefits because infrastructure including roads, sewer and utilities already exists, preventing new taxes from being levied on the city's population unlike construction on the edges of town.

"If people want small government, which a lot of people do these days, then you have to have a small footprint for your city," Burgum said.

Both ends of the political spectrum can agree that having vibrant downtowns benefits everyone, he says. "It's good for health, it's good for workforce development and it certainly is good for keeping taxes down."

Burgum has also seen the challenges and opportunities in Bozeman. As a member of the Yellowstone Club, the world's only private ski and golf community, he's an hour's drive south of town.

"Like a lot of communities, [Fargo's seen] a lot of new growth on the edge—no different from Bozeman," he said. But while the 120,000-resident city of Fargo is reinventing its core, Burgum says Bozeman has preserved its historic downtown.

Left: COURTESY OF KILBOURNE GROUP Right and Below: DAN FRANCIS

" WHEN WE'RE ON A MISSION TO CREATE VIBRANT DOWNTOWNS, WE'RE BASICALLY DRIVING THIS WORKFORCE CONCEPT FOR THE WHOLE CITY."

The Lark Hotel opened on Bozeman's iconic Main Street in April 2015 and is already the most successful hotel in Montana on a per-room occupancy rate. Thinktank Design Group, the architecture firm behind the project, breaks ground in October 2016 on a 28-room expansion.

"We took an old motor lodge and adaptively repurposed it," said Thinktank architect Brian Caldwell, who founded the company in 1999 with his business partner Erik Nelson. "The most ecological thing you can do is not put [an old building] in a landfill."

Burgum agrees, and says that renovating buildings with green roofs to mitigate stormwater runoff and zoning them mixed-use to encourage walkability are some ways his company is limiting its ecological footprint.

"Kilbourne Group looks at renovation of buildings as the greatest green thing we can do," Burgum said. "People get excited about recycling plastic bottles but turn around and knock a building down."

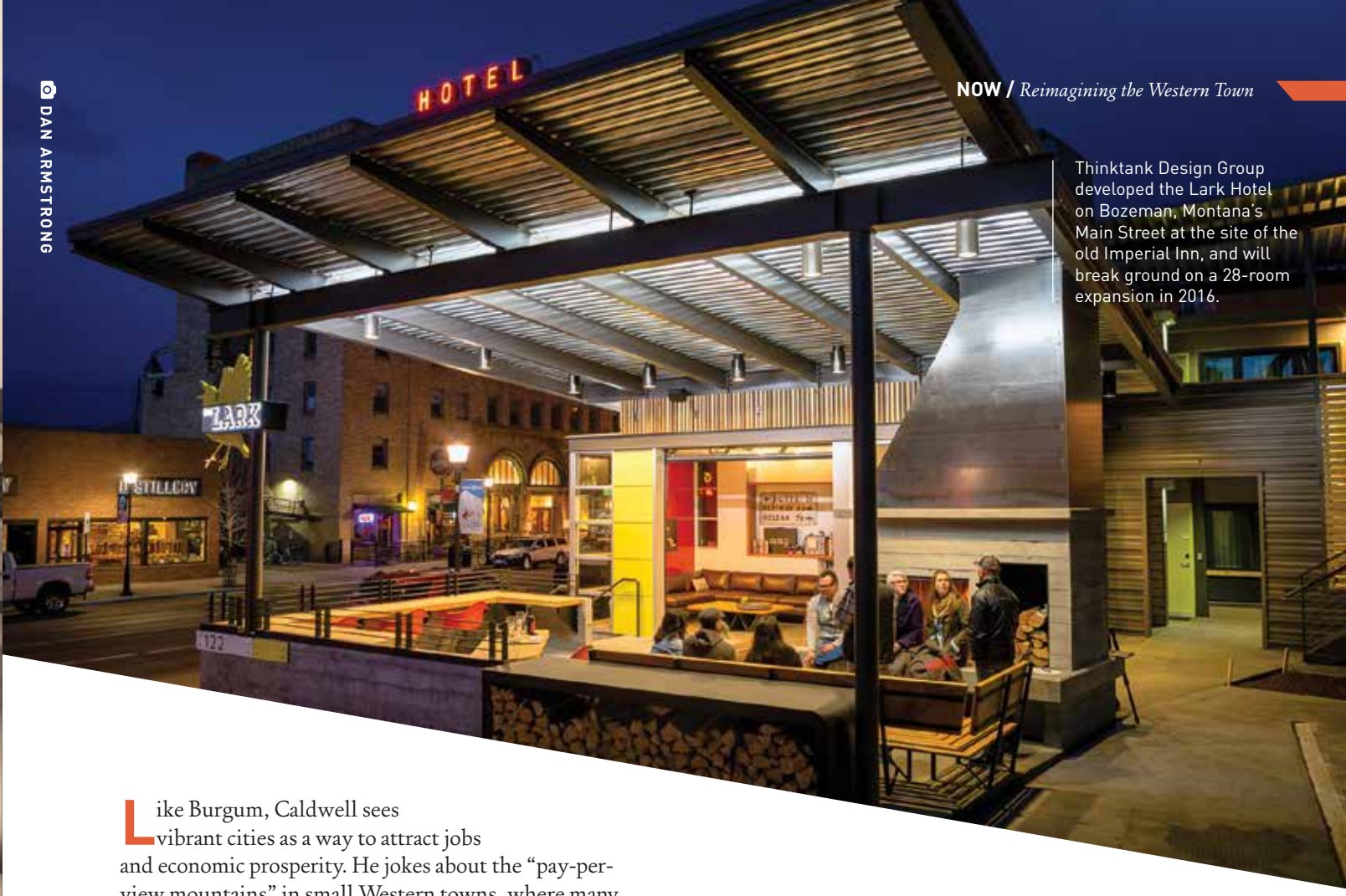
Caldwell sees the benefits of infill projects as essential to Bozeman's future as a vibrant city. "Fundamental planning and making room for our population in the current footprint is critical to Bozeman," he said. "Our development company believes strongly in identifying what needs exist and finding creative solutions in adding to the greater sense of community."

One deficiency Thinktank has identified is a lack of space for live music and events in Bozeman. Instead of looking at new construction on the edge of town, they purchased the historic Rialto Theatre on Main Street in fall 2015 and begin renovation this June. >>

Left: A former vice president of Microsoft Corporation, Burgum hopes to be North Dakota's next Republican governor.

Right: Alley Fair is a community gathering that transforms the alleyways of downtown Fargo by bringing together some of the city's best arts, music, and food.

Below: A Yoga class takes place on the green rooftop of downtown Fargo's 102 Broadway, a Kilbourne Group renovation.



DAN ARMSTRONG

Thinktank Design Group developed the Lark Hotel on Bozeman, Montana's Main Street at the site of the old Imperial Inn, and will break ground on a 28-room expansion in 2016.

Like Burgum, Caldwell sees vibrant cities as a way to attract jobs and economic prosperity. He jokes about the "pay-per-view mountains" in small Western towns, where many professionals make half the income they would in large metro areas.

Thinktank believes the environmental impacts of its projects are paramount, and is building the second stage of the Lark Hotel using cross-laminated timber construction—an innovative design method incorporating prefabricated, solid wood panels that are environmentally low impact compared to conventional methods.

According to Caldwell, it will be one of the first structures of its kind in Montana. While it's 10-15 percent more expensive than using traditional building materials, Caldwell says it's worth the cost to be on the leading edge of green building and to address climate change. "It's the most responsible way to build, period," he said. Caldwell not only looks to wood construction as the past informing the future, but also a way to prop up Montana towns suffering from a declining logging industry.

"Using wood construction in our urban environment is the best way of helping rural communities," he says, adding that archaic building codes favoring steel and cement have slowed cross-laminated timber's development in the U.S. "There's a paradigm shift that needs to happen to use wood [in construction] again."

In Burgum's eyes, Thinktank has already scored a win with the first stage of the Lark. "That's an amazing project they did," he said. And he sees the potential of cities like Bozeman and Fargo as a reflection of how they were first settled, before automobiles and strip malls pushed development outwardly.

"FUNDAMENTAL PLANNING AND MAKING ROOM FOR OUR POPULATION IN THE CURRENT FOOTPRINT IS CRITICAL TO BOZEMAN."

Burgum believes this message will resonate with voters in North Dakota, a state experiencing budget shortfalls because of low oil prices, but also one with a number of communities home to historic downtowns.

"The state doesn't realize that where they put their infrastructure can drive the economics," Burgum said. "We've got a playbook developed in downtown Fargo."

>> BEAVERS / *p. 70*

Watch interview with Dan Wenk at
mtoutlaw.com/standingguard

STANDING GUARD FOR Yellowstone

AS THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE TURNS 100, **SUPERINTENDENT DAN WENK** FIGHTS FOR AMERICA'S CROWN JEWEL

BY **TODD WILKINSON**

Most landscape architects in America do not become civil servants. Of those who do, few ever dwell in a fishbowl where their every move is subjected to intense public scrutiny. In the 144-year history of Yellowstone National Park, only one superintendent, Dan Wenk, began his career musing on how the footprint of humanity might better intersect with wild places.

Forty years ago, Wenk, a southern Michiganer, never imagined spending his entire adult life in the employ of the National Park Service, let alone rising to guard its most iconic crown jewel.

On this day, Wenk is wearing his agency-issue gray and green uniform inspired long ago by the frontier attire of the U.S. Cavalry. Although his appearance is throwback, the skillset he musters is equal parts tree hugger, motivational speaker, 21st century corporate executive (overseeing a staff of 800 and a budget of $70 million) and, by the nature of 2.2 million acres of terrain he safeguards, a field marshal.

Looking after the well-being of America's first national park isn't a popularity contest. In fact, those serving in Wenk's position before him have likened the concept of doing what's right by Yellowstone to an ongoing exercise in masochism. >>

Yellowstone Superintendent Dan Wenk speaks at the re-dedication of the Albright Visitor Center on July 11, 2015.

COURTESY OF NPS

WES OVERVOLD

This morning, Wenk's staff is contemplating the potential impacts of two hardrock mines proposed just north of Yellowstone, one of them near the park border along an important wildlife migration route. They are also preparing for a record onslaught driven by the centennial of the National Park Service giving parks unprecedented visibility as destinations. This summer, Yellowstone is bracing for record numbers of highway-clogging visits, far above the unprecedented 4.1 million mark set in 2015. There's also an estimated $633 million deferred building-maintenance tab and 380 miles of park roadway built originally over the top of rutted stagecoach trails.

His role in the hot seat takes many forms. Last summer, Wenk received hate mail and death threats for euthanizing a mother grizzly bear after the bruin killed and partially ate a hiker near the western shore of Yellowstone Lake. The barrage of condemnation got more intense after Wenk sent the sow's orphaned cubs to the Toledo Zoo in Ohio. The episode, which played out very publicly in August 2015, even elicited a personal phone call from Dr. Jane Goodall—a huge fan of Greater Yellowstone grizzlies—who pleaded unsuccessfully with the superintendent not to impose a death sentence on the mama bear.

A few months later, Wenk endured another backlash that erupted when hundreds of Yellowstone bison naturally migrated over the northern park border into Montana and were herded by Yellowstone rangers into corrals then sent to slaughter. Needlessly, bison advocates said. Even Wenk's colleagues were disgusted. More than 9,000 migratory park bison have been shot or destroyed since the mid 1980s as a result of Montana's intolerance based upon dubious evidence that bison represent eminent threats capable of passing along a disease, brucellosis, to private cattle herds. There's never been a documented case of wild Yellowstone bison transmitting the disease.

On top of that, Wenk has received complaints from tourism officials in West Yellowstone, Montana, for limiting the number of snowmobiles allowed to enter the park; he was condemned by a group of packrafters from Jackson Hole, Wyoming, after he refused to overturn a longtime ban on boating park riverways.

He's reviled in Gardiner, Montana, by hunting outfitters and guides for allegedly letting park wolves kill too many elk. And he's been criticized by some for gill-netting millions of exotic lake trout in Yellowstone Lake in order to save the last great stronghold of native Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

Nearly everything Wenk does makes him a lightning rod. Here, he says something that is perhaps surprising: He doesn't blame his critics. He's grateful Americans feel so passionately about the future of Yellowstone because if there's anything that will lead to its destruction, he notes, it's apathy.

Yes, Wenk says, Yellowstone issues are contentious. Indeed, the words chiseled into the Roosevelt Arch state, "For the benefit and enjoyment of the people," but Yellowstone, he adds, doesn't exist to be a wild amusement park. "The mission of the National Park Service, as spelled out by its enabling Organic Act in 1916, very explicitly says we are tasked with preserving, unimpaired, the natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations," he says. "The key word is unimpaired. Our thinking must be long term, not on which way the wind of public opinion is blowing in a given moment."

Environmental professor Susan G. Clark of Yale University has been thinking about Yellowstone for half a century and bringing out students to let them experience the park as a living, breathing laboratory of natural processes and human ideas about nature.

Clark has been critical of some park managers over the years but Wenk has earned her admiration. "He is not a run-of-the-mill advocate. He's been entrusted by the American people to look after the single most significant piece of real estate in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. And the ecosystem is recognized for having huge national and international significance for the things still found inside it," Clark says. "Wenk takes his role very seriously. I am much more appreciative of the complexity of issues he faces."

In a recent *National Geographic* story, Bozeman, Montana, writer David Quammen puts Wenk in the middle of a quest having to wade through amorphous and artificially constructed concepts. "I call it 'the paradox of the cultivated wild,'" Quammen told an interviewer from National Public Radio in April. "It's paradoxical because we're … saying, 'We want this place to continue to be wild, but in order for it to seem wild, to appear wild, to give people the experience of what the wild in the Northern Rockies is, we've got to do some tinkering, we've got to do some management. We have to have some rules and some boundaries.'"

"He is not a run-of-the-mill advocate. He's been entrusted by the American people to look after the single most significant piece of real estate in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. "

For Wenk, it's two things at once: drawing boundaries to repel perceived detrimental impacts ranging from industrial resource extraction just beyond Yellowstone to such insidious things as climate change and encroachment by invasive aquatic organisms and plant species that diminishes native forage available to ungulates; it's also looking beyond the idea of Yellowstone being an oversized artificial box.

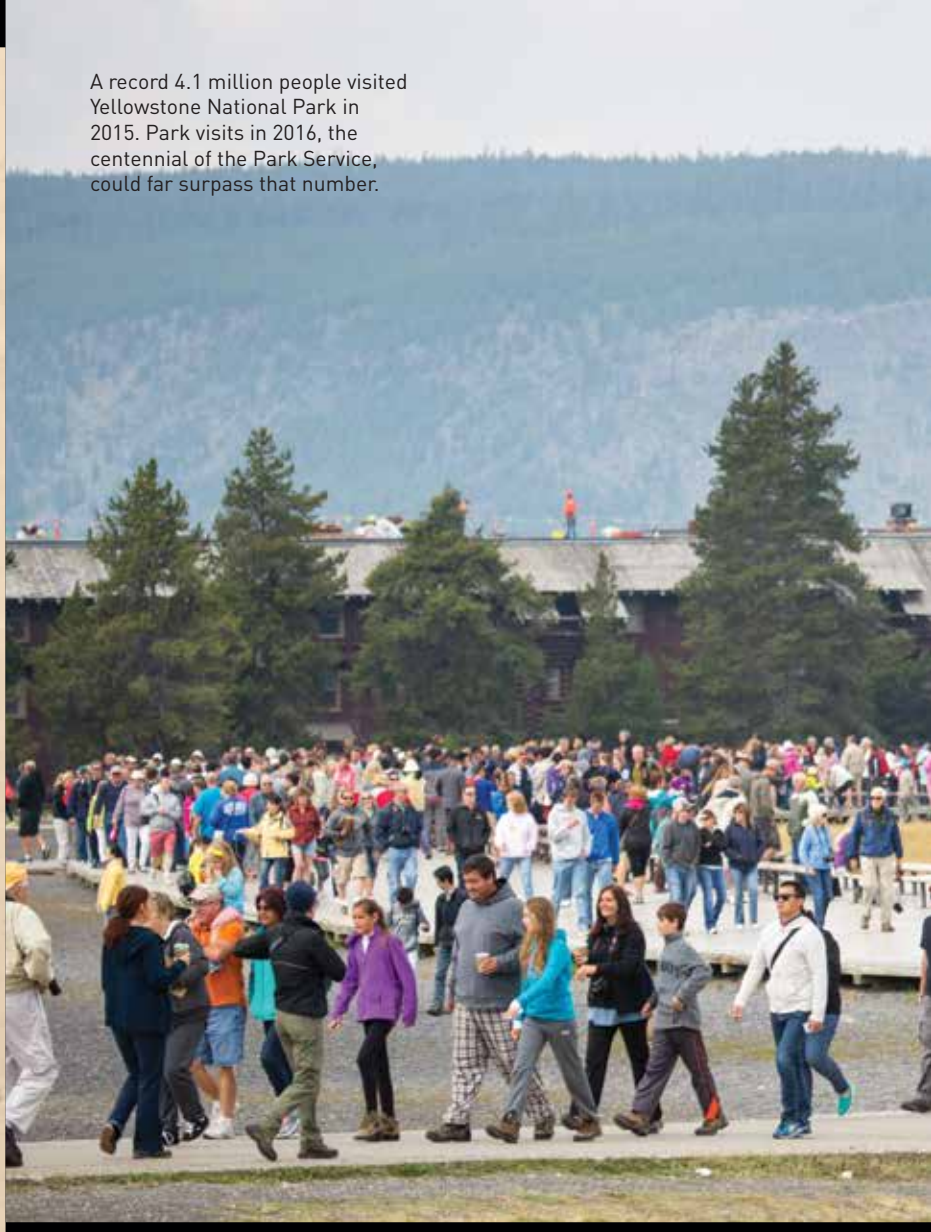
"Dan is courageous, creative and unafraid to advocate strenuously for the health and well-being of the park and the ecosystem," says Caroline Byrd, executive director of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. "He understands how the Park Service works at all levels, top to bottom."

As strange as it sounds, Yellowstone is measurably "wilder" today than it was when the Park Service was created a century ago. It was the first national park in the Lower 48—with the restoration of wolves in the mid-1990s—to regain all its original major species that were there prior to the arrival of Europeans in North America. Grizzly numbers have rebounded and now rising bison numbers are even outcompeting elk on the park's Northern Range. The relationship between predators and prey is playing out dynamically and people are coming to see it.

Citing recent statistics, Wenk says the value of the growing nature-tourism economy in Yellowstone and Grand Teton parks alone is worth more than $1 billion annually. >>

R: Mount Rushmore then-Superintendent Dan Wenk and former Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan observe events commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the dedication of the Mount Rushmore Roosevelt figure on July 2, 1989.

COURTESY OF NPS



A record 4.1 million people visited Yellowstone National Park in 2015. Park visits in 2016, the centennial of the Park Service, could far surpass that number.

The first superintendent post Wenk held, after serving in two other executive-level positions, was at South Dakota's Mount Rushmore National Memorial, the epitome of a human-created landmark and the opposite of Yellowstone. They are in stark contrast but they are both units of the Park Service. Like Yellowstone, Rushmore provokes a conversation that is open ended.

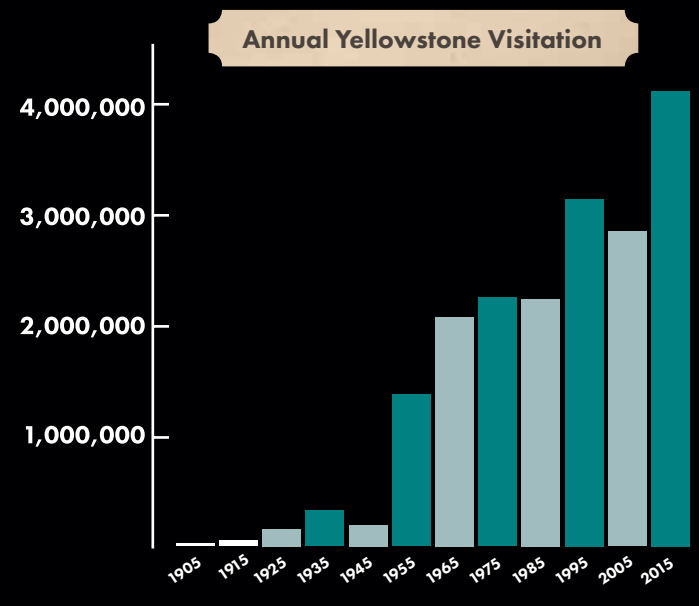
"I came to believe that people took away from Mount Rushmore something of what they brought with them. If they were veterans of World War II and were highly patriotic, they left with a heightened sense of patriotism," Wenk says. "If they were Native Americans with a feeling of oppression, they came away still thinking of it as a travesty on native sacred lands. But with Yellowstone, I think it has the power to transform, to alter your notion of what nature is."

Deconstructing some of the buildings and roads he helped design as a young 20-something landscape architect brought to Yellowstone by then-superintendent John Townsley in the early 1980s, Wenk says less human presence means more wildness. "Today we're looking at how we can contract the development footprint and keep it as minimal as possible," Wenk says. "We will never expand facilities to meet the full demands of visitor needs. That's the role of gateway communities. We see the error of our earlier ways. The best way we can safeguard this place is to let natural processes occur, let them expand to refill their original function."

The greatest threat going forward, Wenk says, is the irony of Yellowstone being so rare in a human-altered world that the region is being swarmed by people drawn to its uncommon beauty. In simple terms, he worries about it being loved to death.

"The least studied mammal in Yellowstone is the human," Wenk is fond of saying. "We have to know more about [what] rising numbers of people are doing to impact the resources of the park and the visitor experience."

For the first time in its history, Yellowstone now has a full-time social scientist on staff, and the information gathered will help inform how the park considers potential limits on numbers of people, including whether a public transportation system is feasible. A quarter century ago, U.S. Senator Malcolm Wallop asked the Park Service to study the potential of having monorails built



in Yellowstone but it was dismissed by the agency as too expensive.

"I don't think most people would mind having a limit set on how they can visit Yellowstone during peak season. The issue is local and regional businesses and economies," Wenk says.

While there is no hard data yet, some gatekeepers in Yellowstone say it appears that in recent years the number of Chinese visitors entering the park has exceeded all non-white Americans. If Hispanic, African-American, Asian-American, and Native-American citizens aren't coming to Yellowstone, that's problematic. "Members of Congress, which in the decades ahead will be comprised of increasing ethnic diversity, will only support things that are important to their constituents," Wenk says. "Park visitation needs to reflect the changing face of America."

" ... Places like Yellowstone can survive because they're becoming more important to segments of our population ... Our society will not let them go."

The flood of Chinese visitors has come replete with its own set of challenges, namely that some are not accustomed to keeping distance from wildlife, staying on the boardwalks in geothermal areas or being courteous at scenic overlooks. In early 2016, Wenk sent letters to 85 bus tour companies catering to non-American tourists warning them to promote responsible behavior around sensitive park resources.

Wenk references the controversy over packrafting and kayaking in which a small group of boaters got Wyoming Congresswoman Cynthia Lummis to introduce a bill that would force Yellowstone to open waters to boating. "They want it because it's forbidden fruit," Wenk says. "We don't know the impacts and they don't care about the consequences."

He cites copious reasons why it's a bad idea, including the lessons from other uses that grew into huge problems once they gained a foothold. "Winter use started with one or two snowmobiles and we ended up with 2,000 a day, and our own park personnel having to wear gas masks at the entrance stations because of the pollution," he says. "The unintended consequences of an action like this we just can't risk."

Wenk says public pressure makes a difference in advocating for resources and he welcomes it. As a result of intense scrutiny from citizens, Yellowstone and the state of Montana are in the midst of rewriting a 16-year-old bison management plan that is expected to result in buffalo given more latitude to roam outside the park.

Wenk is moved whenever he walks through crowds of tourists anonymously in his civilian clothes and hears children tell their parents that hearing a wolf howl or watching a bear tromp through a valley was the most fun they've had in their life.

In recent years, he has presided as chairman of the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee, the interagency body entrusted to look at land management issues across invisible human-drawn boundaries. >>

COURTESY OF NPS

For example, he has tried to press the Forest Service to welcome park bison and to have the Fish and Wildlife Service become better advocates for protecting transboundary grizzly bears, and to embrace habitat protection on behalf of migratory big game herds.

In many instances, he has run into a brick wall. Many agencies are still stuck in their individual silos, still reticent to embrace ecosystem management as the vision was initially presented decades ago. Although many have said Wenk would be a leading candidate for National Park Service director, he says Yellowstone will be his final tour of duty.

"I'm not going away anytime soon but I intend to retire from here. For me, having the opportunity to make some kind of modest contribution to its legacy is all I could hope for. And it means I'll be going out on top."

He hopes the May 2016 edition of *National Geographic,* which is devoted entirely to Yellowstone and is expected to reach upwards of 10 million readers, will help move the dialogue to a higher level because heeding the big picture is the only way the wild values of Greater Yellowstone will endure.

"I think Yellowstone and places like Yellowstone can survive because they're becoming more important to segments of our population," Wenk says. "Our society will not let them go. The challenge [is] really one that should be directed to people in the region making decisions on a daily basis that all add up—county commissioners and city councils and other kinds of elected officials. And people willing to accept limits and self-restraint in order to hold onto something greater."

Yale professor Susan Clark adds her own caveat: "How will Greater Yellowstone be saved? The short answer is we need a lot more Dan Wenks."

Todd Wilkinson has been writing about Yellowstone for 30 years, and other assignments that have taken him around the world. His work has appeared in National Geographic, the Washington Post and dozens of other publications. His latest book, "Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek" (mangelsen.com/grizzly), features images by Thomas D. Mangelsen, who was profiled in the winter 2016 edition of Mountain Outlaw. Wilkinson lives in Bozeman, Montana.

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BEAVERS

A KEYSTONE SPECIES

ILLUSTRATION BY TAYLOR-ANN SMITH

DAM!

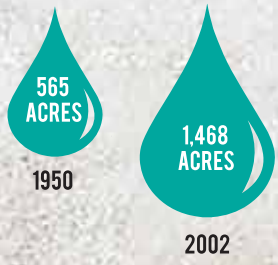
DAMS ALTER THE FLOW OF RIVERS AND CAN FLOOD HUNDREDS OF ACRES ... CREATING NEW ECOSYSTEMS

During floods, beaver ponds capture runoff and slow water velocity that reduces erosion. During periods of drought, this retained water is slowly released providing a constant nutrient source and preventing streambeds from drying. Elevated water tables resulting from dammed water channels also provides a source of drought relief for surrounding plant communities.

SOMETHING IN THE WATER

BY RAISING THE WATER LEVEL, DAMS HELP PURIFY THE WATER AS SILT BUILDS UP AND BREAKS DOWN TOXINS

In 1950, wetlands in Alberta, Canada's Elk Island National Park held 61% less open water (occupying 565 acres) than in 2002 when beavers were well established (occupying 1,468 acres). This increase in beaver dam building has made the area less sensitive to drought.



HOME SWEET HOME

AS SEDIMENT AND DEBRIS BUILD, CARBON INCREASES AND NITROGEN DECREASES. THIS NEW COMPOSITION CREATES A SAFER HOME FOR BIRDS, FISH AND AMPHIBIANS

Beavers share their lodges with mice, muskrats and frogs during the winter season.

AND NATURE'S AQUATIC ENGINEER

THE FACTS

2-14 BEAVERS

MAY LIVE IN ONE COLONY AND ARE USUALLY RELATED

IN ADDITION TO BEING MONOGAMOUS, BOTH THE MALE AND FEMALE TAKE PART IN RAISING OFFSPRING, CALLED 'KITS'

BEAVERS ARE 2ND ONLY TO HUMANS IN THEIR ABILITY TO MANIPULATE THEIR ENVIRONMENT - THE LARGEST BEAVER DAM IN EXISTENCE IS IN WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK, ALBERTA, CANADA AND STRETCHES FOR MORE THAN A 1/2 MILE

LESS THAN 100,000

NORTH AMERICAN BEAVERS WERE ALIVE IN 1930. TODAY, THE POPULATION HAS REBOUNDED TO ABOUT

6 MILLION

A BEAVER CAN LIVE UP TO **24 YRS.**

BEAVERS POSSESS A SET OF TRANSPARENT EYELIDS WHICH ENABLE THEM TO SEE UNDERWATER

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DID YOU KNOW?

IN 1948, IDAHO FISH AND GAME DROPPED BEAVERS OUT OF A PLANE AND PARACHUTED THEM INTO THE FRANK CHURCH RIVER OF NO RETURN WILDERNESS AREA AS PART OF A REINTRODUCTION PLAN. AN APTLY NAMED TRIAL BEAVER, GERONIMO, SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE MISSION WHICH LEAD TO AN ADDITIONAL 76 BEAVERS BEING DROPPED INTO THE BASIN. ALL BUT ONE SURVIVED.

COURTESY OF IDAHO FISH AND GAME

Top: Beavers plunge into the Frank Church Wilderness in wooden boxes to start a new life in the wild. Bottom: Fish and Game Officers prepare a beaver for transportation into the Idaho backcountry.

Pioneering #transparency in energy drinks

For the last decade, Hiball Energy has persevered as the fastest growing natural organic energy drink brand in the nation.

Free of synthetic, artificial ingredients, sweeteners or colors, Hiball incorporates efficacious organic and fair trade ingredients whenever possible which is better for the farmers who cultivate them, more sustainable for the planet, and healthier for customers.

In December 2015, Todd Berardi, President and Founder, and Dan Craytor, Director of Sales, traveled over 16,000 miles through 11 times zones to Chikmagalur, India – the source of the company's organic caffeine.

"What made us want to go halfway around the world? We wanted to usher in a new era of transparency into the energy drink category by being the first company to really expose people to the source of the active ingredient, in our case, organic caffeine," said Craytor. "We wanted to show where it comes from, be totally transparent and give everyone a window into what makes our product so great, and what makes us so passionate about standing behind it."

Craytor expanded that some people may be afraid of energy drinks, and rightly so, since many mainstream brands over the years have created a mystery around what may or may not be in their products, likely because they are relying on cheap, lab-synthesized artificial ingredients.

Berardi reflected that the experience of going to the source, meeting the farmers, picking, sorting, and pulping the organic green coffee beans that are used to extract the organic caffeine in Hiball Energy drinks was truly surreal and further validated the company's mission: to make the healthiest and most sustainable energy drinks on the planet.

"Once I really got in to the particulars about the farmers lives and their livelihood and the sustainability of the plantation is when it clicked for me," said Berardi. "...this is the best scenario for us; this is the best scenario for the planet; and this is the best scenario for the end consumer."

Ultimately, Hiball empowers consumers to make better decisions about where they're getting their energy source. The entire Hiball product platform suits most consumers' desire for no sugar, juice, coffee and now protein for meal replacement and/or pre- or post-workout, all made with Fair Trade, organic, better-for-you ingredients.

"If we can provide a product that makes you feel better and gives you the energy you need to do whatever it is that you want to do in your life, we can feel good about what we're providing, and you can feel good about drinking our product," said Berardi.

The Hiball product family includes sparkling energy waters, organic energy drinks, cold brew coffees, high-protein energy drinks, and a new non-energy fair trade organic sparkling juice line called Alta Palla (Hiball in Italian).

"Hiball has a responsibility to consumers above and beyond the typical energy drink brand," said Berardi. "We are excited to bring transparency to light as our organic and fair trade ingredients for energy are what makes Hiball unique, premium and exceptional."

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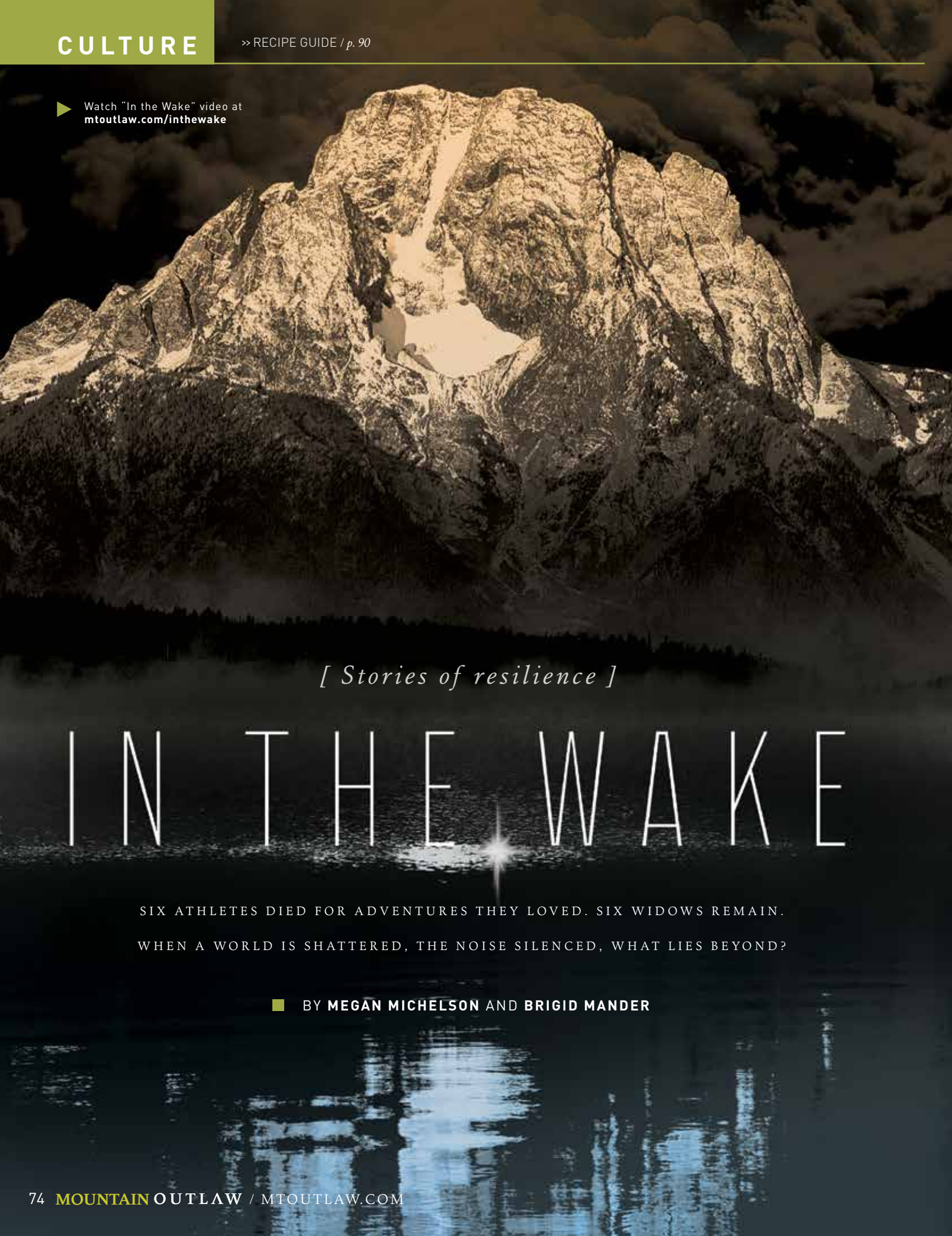


Watch "In the Wake" video at **mtoutlaw.com/inthewake**

[Stories of resilience]

IN THE WAKE

SIX ATHLETES DIED FOR ADVENTURES THEY LOVED. SIX WIDOWS REMAIN.

WHEN A WORLD IS SHATTERED, THE NOISE SILENCED, WHAT LIES BEYOND?

BY **MEGAN MICHELSON** AND **BRIGID MANDER**

We don't know exactly what draws us to the mountains, or the ocean, or the sky.

For some, it's the beauty and serenity, the wild that surrounds us and the chance to exist in places where few feet have trod or skis have descended; the thrill of speed or flight; the knowledge that a positive outcome is not assured; the desire to push oneself to the brink.

For others, it's thrill and fame and hunger: to go bigger, faster, higher. It's a whirlwind of sponsorships and pressure and risk. The noise is loud, and the hype pervades and it's one more trip to ski the Italian Dolomites, or BASE jump off Tahoe's Lover's Leap or skydive from a helicopter, or surf Mavericks. It's all in and it's nonstop and a rush and exhilarating and fast.

And then it stops. All is quiet. The noise silenced. And what is left?

Wives, mothers, husbands, fathers, sons and daughters.

The greater mountain community grieves for those who perished—Alex Lowe, Doug Coombs, Shane McConkey, Rob Ranieri, Luke Lynch and Erik Roner along with a long list of others—but this feature focuses on the women and their children who remain.

The following stories represent one demographic in various stages—from most recent loss to furthest out—of the grieving process as they attempt to move forward with a life forever altered.

That grief comes in waves. At least that's what Emily Coombs says.

Her husband, renowned freeski pioneer Doug Coombs, passed away 10 years ago while attempting to reach a fallen comrade in La Grave, France.

Emily says these waves are unpredictable, varying in frequency and size. But every so often, and even now a decade later, a monster swells and swells. And it feels like it might never break. And then it does. And it almost kills you.

The six women on the following pages talk of the moments they remember most vividly about their loves, and about the second they learned it was over. They talk of crippling fear, of sadness like a vice. They talk of hope and support systems, and of how difficult it can be to accept help. They offer words of wisdom.

"Love is the greatest risk you can take in life," says Jennifer Lowe-Anker, whose husband, Alex Lowe, perished in a 1999 avalanche in the Himalaya.

Six athletes died doing what they loved: mountaineering, skydiving, skiing, BASE jumping. Six widows are left in the wake. Each woman has a different story, but they exhibit a shared strength. The sun rises and sets and rises again stronger each day. These are stories of love and fear, risk and loss. These are stories of resilience. – *The Editors* >>

ERIK RONER 1977-2015 | LUKE LYNCH 1975-2015 | ROB RANIERI 1984-2012 | SHANE MCCONKEY 1969-2009 | DOUG COOMBS 1957-2006 | ALEX LOWE 1958-1999

COURTESY OF ANNIKA RONER, ZAHAN BILLIMORIA, ASHLEY BEDELL, RED BULL MEDIA HOUSE, WADE MCKOY - JACKSON HOLE SKIER MAGAZINE, JENNIFER LOWE-ANKER

[Less than one year]

ANNIKA RONER

The day Erik Roner died, he offered to watch their two kids while his wife, Annika, went for a pre-dawn waterski on Lake Tahoe the morning after a lunar eclipse. When she got home, Erik was at the kitchen counter with Oskar, 5, and Kasper, 1. It was September 28, 2015.

Erik gave Annika a long kiss, and said, "I love you. I'll see you later." He was off to a charity golf tournament at Squaw Valley, California, where he and three others were skydiving out of an airplane to kick off the event. When Annika's sister called later and said Erik had been hurt, Annika rushed to the scene, her body numb and convulsing in tremors on the drive over. "I think that was Erik squeezing me as he passed away," Annika says now.

Annika hangs out with Kasper (left) and Oskar at her home in March.

Erik, 39, a professional action sports athlete and a star of MTV's "Nitro Circus" show, had hit a tree on what should have been a routine skydive for the experienced jumper. "I told Oskar the next day that Erik was gone," Annika says. "He still thinks his dad is here, like a spirit on his shoulder who's always there for him. When I'm having hard days, he says, 'Come on, Mom, just ask Dad to help you.'"

For weeks after Erik's death, friends and family gathered at the Roners' dining room table around the clock, offering support and home-cooked meals. "This community, my friends—they're unbelievable," Annika says. "I'll be in the grocery store and people will come up to me and say, 'If I can help, let me know.'"

Although Erik was calculated with his risks and often backed away from stunts that didn't feel right—especially after having kids—Annika still worried. "I would never tell him no. If he's not the man he wants to be, he's not going to be the father or the husband he wants to be," she says. "But I was very vocal about what I was scared about." Ask about her biggest fear and she'll pause, then half in tears, say, "I was scared of him dying."

Annika and Erik's first date was spent BASE jumping in Idaho. They got married after skydiving out of an airplane onto a Lake Tahoe beach, and in her wedding vows, Annika said to Erik, "For being extreme, you're the kindest person I know." Erik lived his life fully—some would say on the edge—but Annika says he longed to live a simple life at home with his family. "He was ready to tone it down," she says.

Two nights before he died, Erik told Annika he couldn't believe how in love with her he was. "I miss his face, his expressions, his being. I miss him holding me and his kids," Annika says. "I'm in love with someone who isn't here anymore."

Now, Annika is learning to cope with her new reality. "At first, it was shock. Now it's deeper. I cry every day," she says. "I'm a single woman with two kids. They are my focus. That is my future."

Annika says it often feels like Erik is still with them. His ashes rest in a wooden box in a canoe-turned-bookshelf at their Tahoe City home that Erik helped build. Annika took Oskar skiing at Squaw Valley this winter and on their way to the lift, Oskar said, "Dad's right behind us. He's going to come skiing with us today." Just the thought of it made her smile.

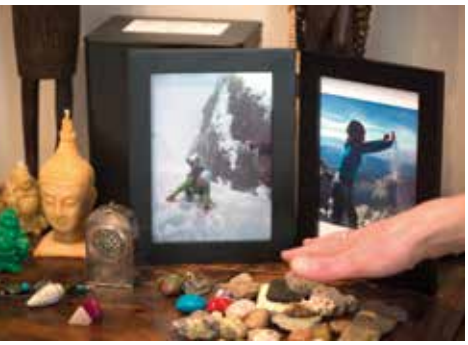
"You have to believe that one day, I'll be a stronger woman because of all of this," she says. "But I'm not there yet." - *Megan Michelson*

JASON ABRAHAM

"I'M A SINGLE WOMAN WITH TWO KIDS. THEY ARE MY FOCUS. **THAT IS MY FUTURE.** "

[One year]

KATHY LYNCH



Above: Dinner with the boys. Kathy with Will (left) and Sam. Max not pictured.

Below: Mementos pay homage to Luke in Kathy's home.

On May 17, 2015, a Teton County sheriff pulled Kathy Lynch out of her afternoon yoga class. He didn't need to speak: she knew why he was there.

Early that morning, Kathy's husband Luke Lynch, a Jackson, Wyoming resident and experienced ski mountaineer, had set out with three other highly skilled alpinists to climb and ski the Sickle, an exposed and committing couloir on Mount Moran in Grand Teton National Park. There had been an accident in the mountains, and Luke wasn't coming home.

A young couple with three small boys, the Lynches hadn't discussed the possibility of either one dying in the mountains: Kathy hadn't married someone who made a living as an extreme athlete. Luke was the Wyoming state director of the Conservation Fund, and served on various community boards.

"We both [were] adventurous people and loved to be in the outdoors," Kathy said. "[Ski mountaineering] was dangerous but I never asked him not to go. It filled his soul. Occasionally, I would get a little worried about it, but that's not how our marriage was—we really respected each other's activities. If you love someone you want them to be their best self."

Kathy found herself wholly embracing the grief, and accepting the accident in order to keep going. "I'm not angry at him … I would take him back in a heartbeat. But I believe that Luke's death was always in the cards … Fate, as you might call it," she said.

"I don't have any judgment for the type of activities that he did. Luke and his ski partners weren't being risky in my opinion—everyone has a different level of acceptable risk. They were trained and experienced—they just had a really bad day in the mountains."

At barely a year since the accident, Kathy hasn't been able to do much beyond care for their three children, and carry on from day to day. "The biggest surprise for me in grief is that it can be both simultaneously excruciating and happy. Every single day I miss him. But we still laugh and dance, my children and I have a lot of fun. You have to be intentional and fight for it.

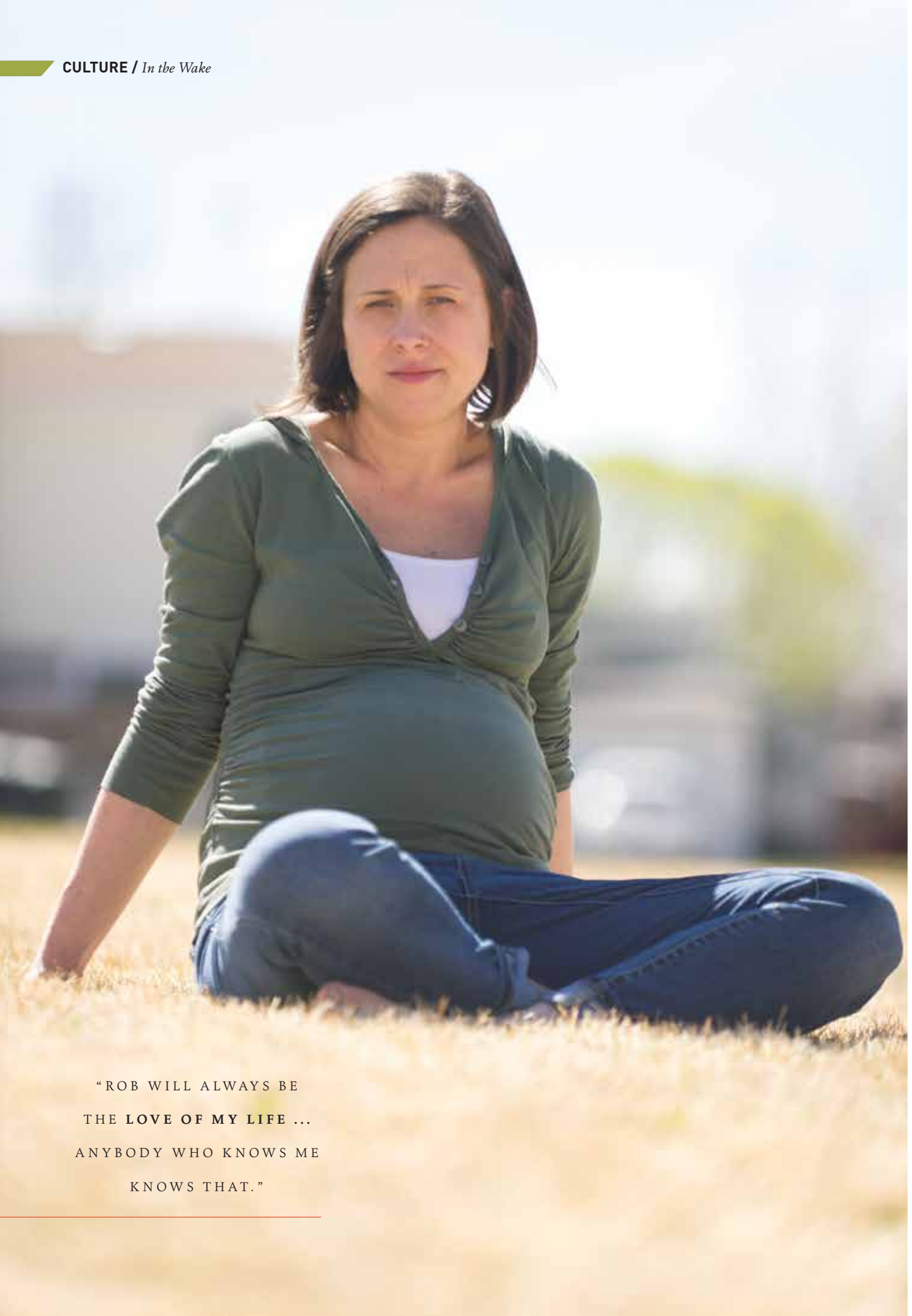
"I used to complain, but what did I have to complain about? Nothing. When I get nervous about something now, I think: I sat my kids down and told them that their dad died. How hard could this be, compared to that?"

In her home, Kathy pointed out a quiet little corner hidden away from sight. On a small table are mementos, a cryptic collection of pieces of Luke's legacy. A twin frame shows two photos: one of Luke beaming up at his ski partners standing above him on the steep bootpack in the Sickle, taken not long before the slough swept Luke and ski partner Stephen Adamson to their premature deaths. The picture opposite shows Kathy spreading ashes into the autumn mountain air from the summit of the Grand Teton, months later.

She holds the frame in her hands, losing herself for a just a moment in the vivid picture of life on the right. "Oh, Luke," she says, her tone a soft mixture of chiding and resignation, but most of all, love. Then Kathy puts the frame back down and looks up from the little table, back into the light and the business of life and raising her boys. - *Brigid Mander*

 KENE SPERRY

"EVERY SINGLE DAY I MISS HIM. BUT WE STILL LAUGH AND DANCE. YOU HAVE TO BE INTENTIONAL AND **FIGHT FOR IT.**"



"ROB WILL ALWAYS BE THE **LOVE OF MY LIFE ...** ANYBODY WHO KNOWS ME KNOWS THAT."

[Four years]

ASHLEY BEDELL

Ashley Bedell and Rob Ranieri didn't have a typical wedding. The theme at Burning Man that year, 2008, was the American Dream and Ashley and Rob decided the best way to celebrate that dream was by getting married jumping out of an airplane over the Nevada desert. A video capturing their wedding shows them skydiving through the air holding hands then landing on the sand and exchanging rings and an exhilarating kiss.

"We got married how we wanted to, where we wanted to. It was us," Ashley says. "We did it our way, like the Sinatra song, our whole relationship we did our way."

A couple of years prior, Rob and Ashley had moved from their home state of New Jersey to South Lake Tahoe, California. Rob worked as a ski patroller at Kirkwood Resort before launching an IT business. He was always a magnet for attention, with his wild, electrified hair and the unicycle he loved to ride. Together, he and Ashley started rock climbing and Ashley, who'd always wished for the ability to fly when she blew out her birthday candles as a kid, introduced Rob to skydiving.

"Rob made me believe in love," Ashley says. "Here was this guy who accepted me for my quirky personality—I'd never had that before."

Their daughter Willow, named after Ashley's favorite tree, was born in late 2011. Ashley quit skydiving once they had their baby, but Rob worshipped the sensation of flying. Six months after Willow's birth, on May 22, 2012, Rob, then 28, went skydiving over Lake Tahoe with some friends.

The winds changed when Rob jumped and he was swept toward the frigid waters of the lake. Trained for emergency water landings, he tried to escape his gear and swim to shore, but it was too cold, too far. According to the GoPro camera he was wearing, he struggled for about 45 seconds before his body shut down. Rescue teams spent hours locating him, while Ashley waited at the hospital for news on her husband's condition.

Willow starts a game of tag with her mother, Ashley.

After Rob died, Ashley's world crumbled with shock. "Honestly, I turned myself off," she says. "That was my idea of resilience—to strongly and independently face something like that and not show emotion. That's what I had to do."

It's taken years for her to open up again. "It took that long to see what I was actually dealing with—Rob's gone, he's not coming back," she says. "Now I actually have to deal with this."

She and Willow, now 4, recently moved to Gardnerville, Nevada, outside of Lake Tahoe. And Ashley has been given a second chance at love—she and her new partner are now expecting a baby. "Willow is going to be the best big sister. Even though her family was halted, it's now going to continue again," Ashley says.

Rob is still very much in their lives and their hearts. Willow wears a locket around her neck with a photo of her mom and dad, and Ashley's willow tree tattoo on her calf includes an "R" for Rob, and a parachute. "Rob will always be the love of my life," Ashley says. "Anybody who knows me knows that." - *Megan Michelson*

[Seven years]

SHERRY MCCONKEY

Sherry and Ayla savor mother-daughter time.

Shane McConkey was supposed to call his wife, Sherry, after every jump. But on March 26, 2009, it was Shane's friend and BASE-jumping partner JT Holmes who called Sherry from the Italian Dolomites. He said two words: "Shane's dead."

They'd been filming for a Matchstick Productions ski movie when Shane's ski BASE jump had gone terribly wrong. Sherry went silent, then screamed. Their daughter, Ayla, just 3 years old at the time, sat next to her scared and confused. Shane was 39 years old.

Sherry was in Southern California, at Shane's dad's place, when she got the news. On her flight home to Tahoe, the grief began to sink in and she had a fleeting morbid thought: "I remember thinking, 'I hope the plane goes down so I don't have to deal with any of this,'" she says.

Seven years later, the wounds feel fresh when Sherry talks about that day. But she also radiates with the glow of a woman still in love when she remembers Shane, a pioneering professional freeskier. The two married on the beaches of Thailand in 2004 and lived a vivacious, adventure-filled life in Squaw Valley, California. "He used to stare at me and smile. He just had that loving look," Sherry says. "His eyes showed everything."

Shane was a goofball, as well. He'd pull pranks like stuffing rocks into his friends' backpacks or stealing cash out of their wallets. Sherry, who grew up in South Africa and left home in search of adventure at age 21, was drawn to Tahoe for the same reason Shane was: the mountains. "Being around him was nonstop entertainment," Sherry says. "I loved him for his adventures and the way he wanted to invent things. He was the most passionate human I've ever met."

When Sherry would get angry with him, Shane would look at her and say, "You're so sexy when you're mad."

The month before he died, Shane wrote Sherry a Valentine's Day card—which she's since read hundreds of times—in which he described what he loved about her. Before he left for Italy, Shane had a dream that he died, which shook him deeply. "I couldn't sleep when he was gone because I worried," Sherry says. "I knew the consequences. We knew he could die. We spoke about it a lot."

At his memorial, Ayla danced amidst the throngs of people and asked, "When is Daddy coming back?" Now age 10, Ayla says goodnight to her dad before bed and although she doesn't remember him, she often looks through the photos and footage that captured his talents and spirit.

Sherry, a quiet athlete with a stout sense of humor, has used mountain biking and yoga as therapy, but she still has hard days. "You don't want to be without the guy you love. The pain doesn't go away. It comes back and you can't breathe," she says. "But I've learned how to cope."

Sherry's also become a philanthropist: She launched the Shane McConkey Foundation two years after his death, which has since donated more than $250,000 to causes like the Make-a-Wish Foundation and Tahoe-area schools and environmental initiatives, all things Shane believed in. She helped produce a documentary about Shane's life and mostly, she's dedicated herself to raising her spirited young daughter, who she says inherited Shane's empathy and goofiness.

"As a mother, I have to show resilience. I have to teach her everything that's right in life," Sherry says. "There are times when I feel like it's too much and I've had enough. But I always try my hardest to show Ayla that life is beautiful and we're so lucky. Life goes on and we need to be strong." - *Megan Michelson*

JASON ABRAHAM

"AS A MOTHER, I HAVE TO SHOW RESILIENCE. I HAVE TO TEACH HER **EVERYTHING THAT'S RIGHT IN LIFE.**"

[Ten years]

EMILY COOMBS

Ten years after her husband, iconic big-mountain skier, mountaineer and professional athlete Doug Coombs died, Emily Coombs has turned her personal tragedy into motivation to help others. For Emily, it has been a long and difficult path. Doug and Emily owned and operated a global steep-skiing camp, and were pioneers in the world of heli-skiing and guided ski trips.

Doug's untimely death in a skiing accident in La Grave, France in 2006, left Emily devastated, without her husband, a source of income, and alone with their 2-year old son, David. "Doug wasn't one to discuss risks; he was such an optimist. He always saw the path and the solution, not the danger. He thrived on risk, and pushed it all the time, but he had such a high level of ability," Emily says.

"I always thought I [would] die first, because I wasn't up to his level but was going where he was going and skiing the same things. Maybe if I hadn't had David I would be dead by now. I wouldn't have wanted Doug to change, though."

When Doug did pass away after falling in an attempt to save his ski partner, Emily nearly fell to pieces.

"It was tragic; it was horrible. I was a complete mess," Emily says. "My mother told me I had to find strength to go on, and I thought, 'How do you find the strength?' Then I realized you get it from other people. And you have to live your life so that you do things for other people. Thinking that way really changed me. You have to leave this earth knowing that you did something to make it better."

Although it took some time, Emily eventually found a way to help others and to honor Doug and the sport he loved so much. In 2012, she began the Doug Coombs Foundation, a nonprofit that engages low-income children from the Jackson Hole community in skiing, soccer and climbing. The beneficiaries are mostly Mexican families, and Emily finds she can draw strength and inspiration from their perseverance in the face of hardship.

Today she runs the foundation from her home in Jackson, Wyoming, a cheerful hideaway with dogs and cats, horses, and chickens. On the walls, photos of La Grave as well as Doug and Emily's ski life celebrate their adventures, but the foundation holds Emily's passion these days.

"I'm attracted to these people," she says. "To me, what they have gone through, to come to this country for a better life for themselves and their children, to me that is resiliency. Compared to them my life was not hard. So what if I lost my husband when I was 46? These people don't complain, and I don't feel sorry for them or they for me.

"But Doug's death changed me. I wasn't born a giver. I think I had to have tragedy before I became a giver." - *Brigid Mander*

Above: Emily and son David share a moment.

Below: "Upon this rock ... " The K2 Coombs poster that Doug signed for David.

 KENE SPERRY

"YOU HAVE TO LEAVE THIS EARTH KNOWING THAT YOU DID SOMETHING TO **MAKE IT BETTER.**"

"**LOVE IS THE GREATEST RISK** THAT YOU TAKE IN LIFE."

[Seventeen years]

JENNIFER LOWE-ANKER

Jennifer Lowe-Anker knew when she married professional climber Alex Lowe that his job, and his passion, was risky. Yet as a climber herself, she understood both the dangers in the mountains and the draw of mountaineering. Alex was known as one of his era's most extraordinary and prolific mountaineers, and traveled the globe to far-flung ranges and high peaks as a successful, sponsored athlete.

"I thought about the risks occasionally, not a lot, but we did discuss it. Nobody that takes risks thinks they are going to die," Jenni says. "Alex thought of mountaineering as a traditional thing, not an extreme sport. He always thought of himself as a risk manager. He used to say things like, 'You know, extreme skiing is kind of crazy.'"

But in 1999, Alex was killed in an avalanche while climbing in the Himalaya. His partner, Conrad Anker, survived. At the time, Jenni was home in Montana with their three sons, ages 3, 7, and 10.

"[The children] were my first responsibility," Jenni says. "My sister came and helped, my friends stepped in and helped; I had an amazing community. The wave of support that came to carry me along was pretty phenomenal.

"I was devastated when Alex died. When you lose someone you love, your life changes overnight, you go into shock. I think our minds are programmed to think we are going to be OK, but when something happens to disrupt that, it takes a while."

The great-granddaughter of Montana homesteaders, Jenni drew some strength from her ancestry. "[Homesteading] was dangerous. It was a crapshoot whether they'd be alive from week to week. I like to think that I have some of that pioneer spirit, where you just persevere. You don't always want to, but you just don't have a choice sometimes."

In the months following Alex's death, Jenni found a measure of peace in creating the Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation, which benefits indigenous mountain people and the Khumbu Climbing Center in Nepal.

"I think from my perspective now, the thing in my life that has brought me the most joy has been reaching out and caring for other people, and other things and places. Starting the foundation and working to help other people who were much less fortunate than me helped me realize my situation was not as bad as it can be.

"Grief is a real thing. You have to walk through it. Everybody grieves differently but at the same time it opens you up: How can I make the best of it?"

Jenni also chose to write a memoir of her life with Alex and of starting over, titled *Forget Me Not*, published in 2009. "I wrote it for myself and my children, mostly," Jenni says. "The book was a huge relief, and closure for my life with Alex."

Left: Jenni shows off a beloved pet.

Right: Also an accomplished painter, Jenni keeps a studio in house.

In the book and in life, Jenni makes no apologies for the risks she and Alex lived with, or for his career choice. She married Alex's former climbing partner Conrad Anker in 2001, and stands by the idea that risk is inherent in living a fulfilling life. "What do you want in the world?" Jenni asks. "A bunch of couch potatoes who never do anything in their safe lives?"

Ultimately, from Jenni's viewpoint, dangerous jobs or passions are not the most perilous choices a person can make.

"When you love people, love is the greatest risk that you take in life. What you are risking is losing someone who means a lot to you. It's a greater risk than anything you are ever going to do." - *Brigid Mander*

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But that may not be your worst indulgence. According to a 2012 study in the journal *Neurology,* a daily chocolate dose correlates with lowered risk of stroke. And scientists broadly acknowledge that eating dessert releases mood-enhancing dopamine in the brain.

No matter the time of day you eat yours, whether as an appetizer or nightcap, make sure you drop a line to these restaurants and try the following dessert recipes at home. Your taste buds will thank you. – *Ersin Ozer*

ZAK JOKELA

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Doug Fir Ice Cream and Huckleberry Cobbler

DOUG FIR ICE CREAM

1 cup Douglas fir needles (rinsed)
¾ cup honey
1 quart heavy cream
14 egg yolks
½ cup sugar

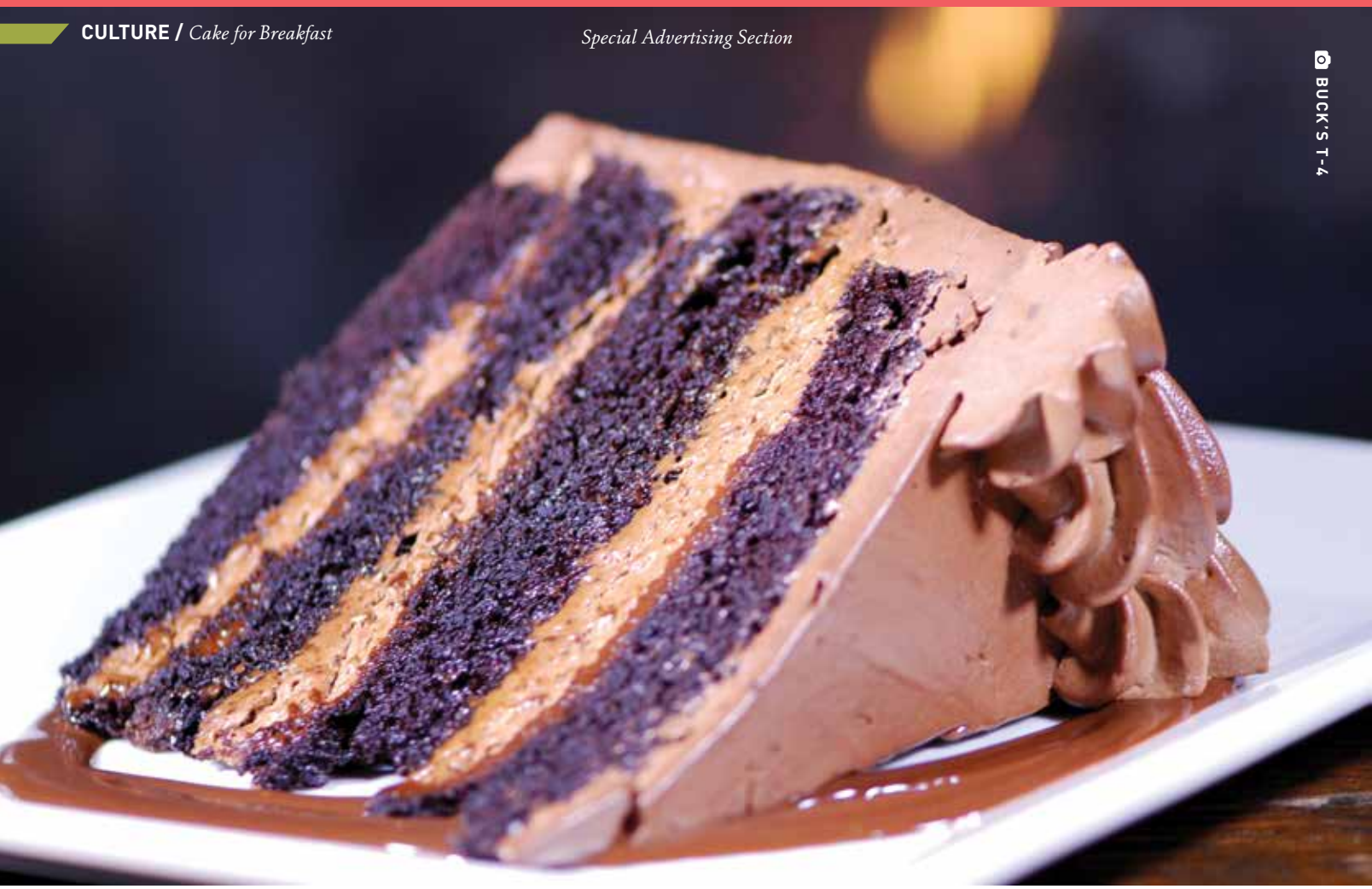
In a saucepan, bring needles and honey to boil. Whisk in cream, bring back to boil. Remove from heat and rest 10 minutes. Fine strain into a saucepan. Return to boil then remove.

In a separate bowl, whisk egg yolks and sugar. Slowly add hot honey-cream mixture, whisking continuously. Return mixture to saucepan, heat, stirring constantly until 160 F. Chill overnight. Use liquid nitrogen or ice cream maker.

HUCKLEBERRY COBBLER

¼ cup butter
½ cup sugar
1 cup flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ cup milk
1 cup huckleberries
zest from 1 lemon
¾ cup sugar
½ cup boiling water
6 tablespoons butter

Preheat oven to 375 F. Butter 9-inch square pan. Mix cream, butter and sugar until fluffy. Combine flour, baking powder, salt: stir into butter. Fold in milk until thick and lumpy. Spread into pan. Combine sugar, zest, berries and boiling water. Pour over batter in pan. Dot with butter then bake 45 minutes or until crust is golden brown.



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Chocolate Cake with Mousse and Ganache

¾ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
1 ½ cups sugar
1 ½ teaspoons baking soda
¾ teaspoon baking powder
¾ teaspoon salt
2 large eggs
¾ cup low-fat buttermilk
¾ cup warm water
3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350 F. Butter two 8-inch cake pans. Dust with cocoa. Sift cocoa, flour, sugar, soda, powder, and salt into mixing bowl. Beat on low until just combined. Increase heat to medium, and add eggs, buttermilk, water, oil, and vanilla. Beat until smooth. Pour into cake pans. Bake until toothpick comes out clean.

CHOCOLATE MOUSSE

5 ¼ ounces chocolate chips
14 ounces heavy cream
3 egg whites
1 ounce sugar

Melt chocolate in double boiler and cool. Whip cream. Whip egg whites with sugar to stiff peaks. Fold egg whites into chocolate. Fold in whip cream. Put aside in fridge.

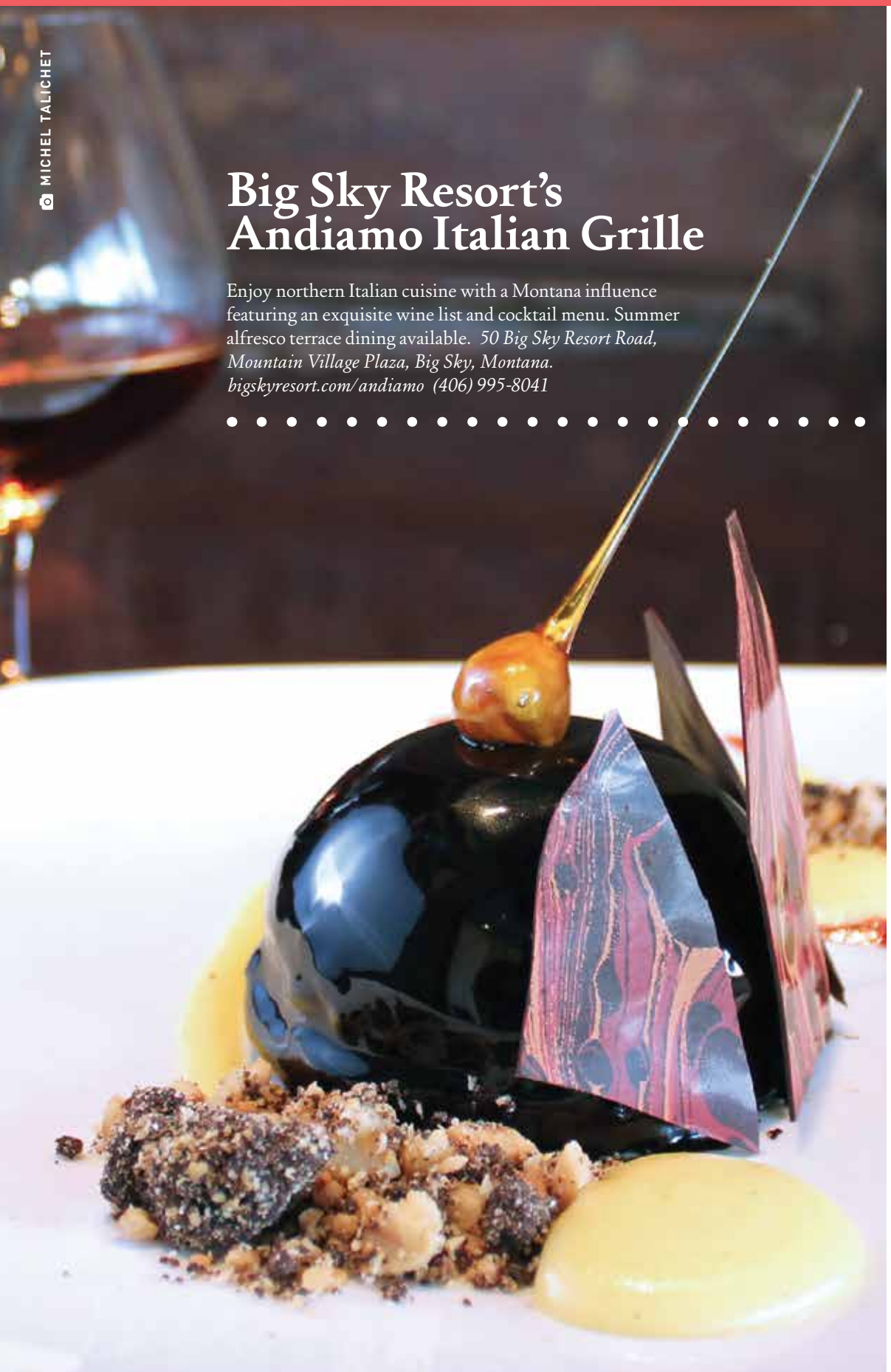
GANACHE

1 cup heavy cream
½ cup chocolate chips

Heat heavy cream in saucepan to simmer. Pour over chocolate.

BUILD CAKE

Place first cake round on cake board. Spread mousse then spread ganache. Place top cake layer. Let cake set in fridge for 15-20 minutes then frost!



MICHEL TALICHET

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Gianduja Bombe

Chocolate mousse filled with a hazelnut cream tops your favorite chocolate cake recipe, coated in chocolate streusel and caramelized hazelnuts. A dark chocolate mirror glaze garnishes this dessert with a caramelized hazelnut on a bed of limoncello crème anglaise and raspberry coulis.

MOUSSE

12 ounces dark chocolate
3 ounces yolks
5 ounces sugar
1 ounce water
14 ounces cream

Bring sugar and water to a boil and add to whipped eggs. Whip cream to soft peaks, then fold eggs and cream together. Melt and fold chocolate into mixture and add hazelnut cream.

CHOCOLATE GANACHE

1 1/2 ounces evaporated milk
16 ounces heavy cream
1/2 ounce butter
16 ounces chocolate

Bring evaporated milk and cream to a boil, pour over chopped chocolate. Whisk until smooth then stir in butter.

ASSEMBLE

Bake a chocolate cake. Once cool, spread hazelnut cream on cake then pour chocolate mousse over hazelnut cream. Cover and refrigerate for three hours. Pour warm ganache over assembled cake and refrigerate until ganache is set. Cut and serve with vanilla bean ice cream.

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Elevated Chocolate Cheesecake

Serves 12

Note: Allow at least 2 ½ hours for preparation. Steps 1 and 2 can be done the night before and refrigerated.

Tools: 9-10-inch springform pan, 12-inch baking sheet, foil, double boiler

MILK CHOCOLATE MOUSSE

1-pound milk chocolate bar
1 ½ cups heavy cream, whipped
½ teaspoon Knox gelatin, melted
Melt chocolate over hot water in double boiler. Whisk gelatin into melted chocolate then fold whipped cream into chocolate. Refrigerate at least two hours.

CHOCOLATE GLAZE

1 ¾ cup cream
2 ¾ cups sugar
¾ cup sifted cocoa powder
1 ½ tablespoons Knox gelatin, melted
Boil 3 1/3 cups water, cream and sugar. Remove from heat. Add cocoa powder and gelatin then refrigerate at least two hours.

CHOCOLATE CAKE CRUST

Use your favorite chocolate cake mix and preheat oven to 350 F. Pour a ½-inch layer in a 12-inch baking sheet and bake 12-15 minutes. Use bottom of springform pan to cut a circle of cake then place in springform pan.

RAINBOW RANCH'S VANILLA CHEESECAKE

3 ¾ 8-ounce bars of cream cheese
1 ¾ cups sugar
6 eggs
¼ cup heavy cream
¼ teaspoon vanilla

Preheat oven to 325 F. Mix ingredients together and pour into springform pan. Wrap foil on bottom and sides of pan to cover completely and extend 2 inches above rim to prevent burning top of cheesecake. Place on baking sheet filled with ½-inch of water and bake 1 ½ hours. Let cool.

CHOCOLATE BUTTERCREAM FROSTING

Use premade or make from scratch.

ASSEMBLE

Remove cheesecake from springform pan. Layer chocolate mousse over top of cooled cheesecake. Reheat chocolate glaze over water bath to slightly warm and pour over top. Frost edges with chocolate buttercream frosting. Invite 12 of your favorite people over and enjoy!

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SUMMER ON WHEELS

MOUNTAIN BIKE GEAR GUIDE FOR OFF-ROAD ADVENTURE

WES OVERVOLD

When ski town chairlifts stop spinning, gravity enthusiasts start tuning mountain bikes and dreaming of the "brown pow" to come. Resorts in the Northern Rockies increasingly are recognizing the explosion of the sport and developing their biking opportunities in an effort to diversify beyond winter recreation.

Long known for steep, rocky and technical trails, Big Sky Resort has revolutionized its trail system in the last few years, adding miles of machine-built downhill, cross-country and flow trails. In May 2016, Big Sky was named one of the best northwest bike parks in mtbparks.com's "Riders' Choice Awards" for the second consecutive year, sharing the top five with Montana's Whitefish Mountain Resort and Grand Targhee Resort in Wyoming.

Smaller ski areas are tossing skin in the game as well. Outside of Philipsburg, Montana, Discovery Ski Area's bike park has become a favorite of riders around the region for lift-accessed downhill, drawing mountain bikers from Big Sky, Bozeman and Missoula every summer weekend. This issue of *Mountain Outlaw* celebrates the efforts of the trail crews, designers and visionaries that are turning our favorite winter destinations into summer playgrounds.

Here you'll find some of the year's hottest gear to get you on the trails in safety and style. Get yourself some wheels, load up the crew and see what the Rocky Mountain biking buzz is all about. – *The Editors*

DIAMONDBACK RELEASE 2

The Release 2's 6061 aluminum frame with hydroformed tubes and a Level Link rear suspension platform is a downhiller's dream—one that wrenches you out of bed in the middle of the night, leaving you yearning for daylight and your next chance to ride.

With a RockShox Pike 150 mm travel fork in the front and 130 mm RockShox Monarch DebonAir shock in the rear, the Release 2 absorbs rough, snappy descents like a champ.

The SRAM GX 1x11 drivetrain takes out the gear-shifting guesswork while grinding away on the uphill, and reduces potential chain derailing so you can focus on the riding.

Diamondback Blanchard 27.5-inch wheels and performance Schwalbe Hans Dampf tires give you the traction and cornering you desire both climbing and descending, and the rims come tubeless-compatible for those looking to shave a few ounces and lessen the likelihood of a spirit-dampening flat.

Rounding out this singletrack beast, a KS dropper post allows you to raise and lower the seat post on the fly with a flick of your left thumb—making the Release 2 instantly ready for any terrain you throw its way this summer.
diamondback.com $3,800

ESSENTIAL

MOUNTAIN BIKE GEAR

SMITH FOREFRONT HELMET
One of its more popular helmets, Smith has cashed in on a trifecta with the Forefront: top-of-the-line impact protection, lightweight and breathable design, and a modern fit. The airflow-friendly construction is welcome on the uphill while MIPS—a patented technology that protects against rotational forces in a fall—provides peace of mind on the downhill. **smithoptics.com $260**

SMITH PACE SUNGLASSES
Designed to stay put, these frames have auto-lock hinges and hydrophilic nose pads to keep them from slipping off your face on steep switchbacks. The polycarbonate lenses are lightweight and the gray gradient tint offers relief from bright sun but isn't so dark that you lose detail on forested stretches of the trail. Smith's lifetime warranty kicks in an added bonus. **smithoptics.com $89**

STIO WOMEN'S DIVIDE SHIRT
You wouldn't think a polyester/cotton blend would possess such powerful temperature- and moisture-regulating properties, but thanks to patented Drirelease technology, it performs. Fifteen minutes after loading up the bike post-ride, the shirt was bone dry. Three-quarter length sleeves roll up with a button closure, and the fit is flattering but not too snug. **stio.com $79**

LEATT AIRFLEX ELBOW GUARDS
Like the knee guards below, the sleeves of the Airflex elbow guards are made of a stretchy and breathable wicking fabric with antimicrobial properties called MoistureCool. The interior of the elbow pad contains silicone patterning to help hold them in place, and once they're on it's easy to forget you're even wearing them—until you need them. **leatt.com $59**

LEATT AIRFLEX DBX 4.0 WIND BLOC GLOVES
These gloves pair a buttery smooth fit with crucial impact protection. The knuckles as well as the third and fourth fingers are protected with Armourgel, a visco-elastic polymer heralded for its energy absorption properties and a favorite component of Leatt products. The windproof midlayer makes them perfect for chilly fall rides or alpine adventures. **leatt.com $55**

STIO WOMEN'S CRESTER SHORTS
The Crester shorts have a slim Bermuda cut but plenty of stretch, too, so you'll feel comfortable on the trail or back in town over a recovery pint. Constructed with 88 percent nylon and 12 percent spandex, the Cresters are designed with functionality in mind: the five pockets (including one with a zipper) feature a mesh lining that allows plenty of air circulation. **stio.com $75**

LEATT AIRFLEX PRO KNEE GUARDS
Since Leatt has been in the game, they've built a reputation on protective bike gear that meets European safety standards. The AirFlex Pro knee guards are tough but still breathable: perforations in the Armourgel allow for ventilation and a wicking sleeve sheds heat. They're light, too, weighing in at 0.7 pounds a pair. **leatt.com $79**
– Amanda Eggert

An Absaroka adventure:

BENBOW MINE

BY **TAYLOR-ANN SMITH**

In summer 2003, I spent a week at Beartooth Christian Camp in Fishtail, Montana. It was a fantastic experience for a 12 year old: zip lining, making crafts, and riding a horse named Sniff, but I was eager to see my family.

When my dad's pickup truck approached I noticed something different. In tow was a huge white trailer I'd never seen before. I tried asking about it while my mom tried to hug me and my dad packed my bags in the car. It wasn't until we drove a few miles up the road that I discovered the treasure in the trailer.

My parents led my younger brother Tanner and me to the back of the trailer and opened it. Inside were four ATVs—one for each of us. This trip kicked off my family's love for four-wheeling and one of my favorite childhood memories.

Our first adventure began in a popular Absaroka Range recreation area at the old abandoned Benbow Mine. Nestled in the mountains of the Custer National Forest, this mine once functioned as a source for chromium and platinum in the early 1900s when World War I created a demand for stainless steel.

The author and her family at Chrome Lake on their first ATV adventure in 2003.

During World War II, the Anaconda Copper Mining Company rebooted operations at Benbow. After closing in 1961, additional exploratory work showed rich deposits of platinum and palladium in the area. By 1986, full underground mining operations commenced in the present day Stillwater Mine—the only U.S. producer of palladium and platinum—while other nearby mines closed due to mineral depletion. While the Benbow Mine closed in 1971, the headframe is still standing and although the shafts are boarded up they're still fun to walk around and explore.

Above: TAYLOR-ANN SMITH Below: STEPHANIE SMITH

BENBOW BY THE HOUR

Getting here (9 a.m.)

From Bozeman, drive I-90 east toward Billings then take exit 408 at Columbus and follow the route to Absarokee. This quaint town is approximately 15 miles from the exit and you'll cross the bridge over the Yellowstone River. Continue past Absarokee and take a right at the Cenex gas station onto Nye Road. Drive a few miles to the tiny town of Fishtail.

Lunch/Stock up (12 p.m.)

Enjoy small-town Montana charm at Fishtail's Cowboy Bar and fill up on local fare before your mountain adventure. Try the deep-fried green beans as an appetizer, and check out the beef selection for classic Montana dishes such as ribeye steak and burgers. Kids menu: Hands down, go for the chicken tenders and fries.

After your meal, pop in next door to the historic Fishtail General Store for fishing supplies, snacks and souvenirs. Open since 1900, this mercantile also carries Montana antiques, and an original wood-burning, potbellied stove still heats the place.

To Benbow! (1 p.m.)

The Benbow Mine area's variable terrain makes it one of my favorite places to ride ATVs. From novice to experienced, riders will love exploring the winding dirt roads, mine, lake and trails. To begin the family adventure, drive from Fishtail on Nye Road and take a left onto Benbow Road. A dirt two-track will take you into the national forest and to the main parking area with campsites.

Once you unload the ATVs, take the main trail about 11 miles, to the headframe of the mine. The trail leads to an elevation of 8,480 feet and boasts stunning views along the way. Wide enough for high-clearance vehicles and side-by-side ATVs, the trail is easy to navigate and makes for a perfect family excursion. Along the way, admire the huge limestone palisades that resemble the backs of Stegosaurus. You'll also see deep valleys carved out by glaciers during the last ice age. Approximately 25 small glaciers still exist in the Beartooth Range and some of these relics are visible from the trail.

At the mine (1:45 p.m.)

The massive steel headframe of the Benbow Mine is just as impressive as the views you'll encounter. Take time to explore the mining area and search for natural souvenirs of bronzite rock that's scattered about from excavation. Avoid climbing down the dilapidated stairs into the mine's shaft, but kids will enjoy getting close and their imaginations will wander to what lies 200 feet below the ground they stand on. >>

CHRIS VANDERLIIP

The Benbow Mine was once a lucrative source for chromium and platinum in the early 1900s. It now stands as a popular recreation area to explore.

Any sweet tooth is satisfied at the Montana Candy Emporium.

TAYLOR-ANN SMITH

Chrome Lake (3 p.m.)

Fueling both mine and the miners, the small Chrome Lake lies just a few miles past the Benbow Mine headframe. Continue past the mine on U.S. Forest Service Trail 2414 a few miles where you'll enter a small clearing with the lake shining in the middle. Plan to fish? Chrome Lake contains coveted Yellowstone cutthroat trout as well as Arctic grayling. Explore a handful of walking trails surrounding the lake and keep an eye out for wildflowers such as alpine buttercups, tiny primroses and Indian paintbrush.

Dinner and Dessert (5 p.m.)

Once you've made the trek back down the main trail and loaded up your machines, it's time for dinner and a special treat for the kiddos. Instead of taking the route toward Columbus, head back to Absarokee and take a right southbound onto MT-78 south toward Roscoe. This favorite backcountry road winds up and down Carbon County's hills and through massive clusters of aspen trees. Keep an eye out for moose and elk!

Soon you'll arrive in the quaint town of Red Lodge where you'll find the perfect meal to cap off your day of exploring at the Red Lodge Pizza Co. Serving hand-tossed pizza with generous toppings, salads, and "Montana Rolls," this family-friendly restaurant will make you feel like a local and fill up the whole crew.

After dinner, make one final stop at the quintessential Montana Candy Emporium. This famous shop is what kids' dreams are made of: rows upon rows of buckets filled to the brim with every candy imaginable. The drill is to grab a brown bag and fill it with as much candy as you can then pay by weight. Fresh fudge, truffles and chocolate-dipped treats are made daily on site. Be sure to pick up a locally made Montana favorite: huckleberry syrup, taffy or jam.

Snack on your sugar stock as you make your journey home and reminisce about your adventure.

SUMMER DAYS

Plan your Benbow adventure around these fun dates:

June 25:

Fishtail Family Fun Day

Fishtail, MT

BBQ lunch, auction, live music, parade, and a duck race

July 22-24:

Cruisin' Red Lodge Car & Bike Show

Red Lodge, MT

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Red Lodge, MT

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Lindsay Koenig shows how it's done.

WOMEN IN WADERS

Montana Women's Fly Fishing School

BY **KELSEY DZINTARS**

IT WAS A SNOWY SPRING MORNING AT GALLATIN RIVER GUIDES. Five women gathered around a table filled with fruit, pastries and coffee in the Big Sky, Montana fly shop, studying slides with photos and illustrations of different river-flows. Kara Tripp, our instructor and owner of the women's based fly-fishing company, Damsel Fly Fishing, explained how to read the river, where fish will be in the current, and why.

An hour later we "wadered up" at Reynolds Pass on the Upper Madison River and divided into groups of two and three to put our newfound knowledge to the test.

I slid into the river, wavering against the heavy current on the slippery rocks like a newborn deer trying to stand. I thought about what I had just learned in the classroom, now looking at the boulders and riffles as structures and seams where I would attempt to place my fly. To my total surprise, I immediately set my hook into a small rainbow. This was the first time I had caught a fish utilizing strategy rather than trial and error, and I was officially hooked myself.

Over the past several years, women have flocked to the traditionally male-dominated sport of fly fishing. According to the 2015 Special Report on Fishing conducted by the Outdoor Foundation, 31 percent of the 5.8 million Americans who participate in fly fishing are female.

Fly-fishing outfitters and outdoor retailers have taken note of the trend. In 2015, Montana companies Gallatin River Guides, Simms and Montana Fishing Outfitters teamed up to create the Montana Women's Fly Fishing School, the first and only of its kind in southwest Montana designed and run by women. In 2016 the school offers 13 sessions from March to October.

Gallatin River Guides' owner, Pat Straub, saw the demand firsthand. "At our fly shop, we would constantly see women coming in with a high level of interest, but many felt like they were uneducated or intimidated by fly fishing," Straub said. "We started with Gallatin River Gals, our free weekly fishing gatherings for women. The excitement that created morphed into many women asking for a longer experience, and voilà, the Montana Women's Fly Fishing School was born."

During the three-day course, beginners and intermediate anglers learn essential skills like tying knots,

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July 7-9, 14-16
August 4-6,11-13
September 1-3,15-17
October 6-8

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reading the river, casting, basic entomology and fly pattern selection. Each day begins with classroom instruction followed by application on Montana's world-famous waters, including the Gallatin, Madison and Yellowstone rivers.

Tripp is enthusiastic about getting more women involved in her lifelong passion. "When I started fly fishing 17 years ago, I didn't know any other girls that liked fly fishing like I did," Tripp said. "I don't need a bunch of fancy data to tell me that women fly fishing is the fastest growing niche. Why? Because its fun, and in the words of Cyndi Lauper, women '… just wanna have fun …'"

At the end of the nine-hour day, we relaxed with hot toddies and French fries at the Gallatin Riverhouse Grill south of Big Sky, relating strategies of the day and stories of our lives. A few days on the river with experienced fisherwomen gave me the camaraderie and confidence I needed to graduate to the next level in my new favorite sport.

Guides Anne Anderson and Kara Cain

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A Merman's Tale

Wherein I attempt to assimilate into the culture of the Sip 'n Dip's merpeople

JEFF MANGAN

BY **EDNOR THERRIAULT**

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE WEARING A MERMAID TAIL AND YOU HAVE TO PEE? Well, when a bar full of people is watching, you can't just smile and whiz in the pool like you're at the Holiday Inn. You have to leave the water.

Forget about the ladder—I still have a big purple bruise on my right foot from trying to negotiate that thing while wearing the tail. My solution was to grab the lip of the pool, heave myself out of the water and flop onto the deck like a trained seal. Once I managed to struggle to my feet, I did the "mermaid shuffle," a series of tiny steps to the bathroom.

Being a merman is harder than it looks.

I recently had the chance to wear a tail and swim with the merfolk at the infamous Sip 'n Dip Lounge at O'Haire Motor Inn in Great Falls. It was ladies' night, and they'd recently started plopping mermen into the pool to provide some eye candy for the rowdy gals at the bar. I wanted in.

We're talking about a Montana icon here. The Sip 'n Dip was named the "Top Bar on Earth Worth Flying For" by *GQ Magazine* in 2003, and when you stroll inside it's easy to see why. The retro, tiki-themed lounge has a real you're-on-vacation feel, with its bamboo wall coverings, seashore-print vinyl booths and lacquered rattan ceiling. Strings of lights crisscross the room and there's a piano bar near the door where "Piano" Pat Spoonheim has been playing most nights for more than 50 years. And there, behind the smiling staff making colorful drinks at the bar, is the main attraction of the Sip 'n Dip: two large windows revealing the mermaid tank.

Above: The author maneuvers through plastic seaweed in the Sip 'n Dip's famous mermaid tank.

A dark-haired mermaid and two fit, tail-clad mermen perform lazy loops in the pool, frequently swimming over to the glass to smile, wave and blow air-bubble kisses to the delighted patrons.

One of the mermen, Perseus, glides past the glass as two women eyeball him from the bar, sipping from enormous tiki drinks bristling with umbrellas and straws. "I bet that one's a Marine," says one. "I'd know a military body anywhere." She winks and gives a little wave to Perseus, who waves back and surfaces for a gulp of air. The woman puts a conspiratorial hand next to her cheek, saying sotto voce to her companion, "I want to put him in my suitcase and take him home."

Unlike Perseus, I do not have a military body. I have the kind of physique that elicits comments like, "I see you wintered well." I'm covered with a layer of what I like to call relaxed muscle. >>

SCOTT PHOTOGRAPHY

Above: The Sip 'n Dip mermaids hit the pool six nights a week and every other Sunday morning for an all-ages brunch crowd. Tuesday is Ladies' Night, when the mermen put on a show.

Left: "Piano" Pat Spoonheim entertains patrons at the Sip 'n Dip piano bar three nights a week. She's been tickling the ivories there for 50 years.

WHEN IT'S TIME FOR ME TO ENTER THE POOL, which is a comfy 89 degrees, I wriggle into my tail, fit my goggles over my eyes and swim toward the deep end. Well, "swim" isn't really the right word. It's more like doggie paddling with only the front paws, dragging around this spandex and lace contraption that pins my legs together.

A modified breaststroke allows me to plunge to the bottom of the 8-foot-deep tank, fighting the buoyancy of my relaxed muscle, and I smile and mug at the colorful shapes moving around behind the glass in the bar. I assume they're people—I can't see squat because every time I dive my poorly fitted goggles immediately fill with chlorinated water. Within 10 minutes my eyes are burning and I look like I've just come from a Cheech and Chong movie marathon.

Perseus, his fellow merman Archer and the mermaid Venus are patient and helpful with this pudgy, middle-aged writer whose main objective is to avoid drowning. Venus, a high school senior, teaches me how to blow kisses and do barrel rolls. Archer shows me how to execute a slow back loop, sucking in air at the water's surface like a whale clearing its blowhole.

... after a half hour of looking more like a cat in a bathtub than a mythical ocean creature, I finally start to feel like I'm working it.

The bar begins to fill up and I pull a few stunts for the customers. At one point I come up for air after a particularly agile (I thought) set of moves through the plastic seaweed on the bottom. "Hey, Flounder," says Venus, using my merman name. She's resting at the edge of the pool, checking her phone. "My mom says you're losing your tail."

I look down and sure enough, my rig has slipped down several inches exposing the top of my black compression shorts.

My tail, like all the tails, was fabricated by Sandi Thares, the hotel's general manager and mermaid wrangler. "The more I sew, the better they get," she said. Her family has owned the O'Haire since 1968, she told me that afternoon as we sat in her cluttered office piled high with boxes spilling wigs, leis, tails and glittery bras. An entire wall is covered with dozens of framed, autographed photos of celebrities including Keith Urban, Eric Church and Barry Manilow, who've visited the Sip 'n Dip over the years. The idea for the mermaid bar, she said, was inspired by a visit her dad made to the Playboy Club in Chicago. In 1996 they duct-taped a green tablecloth around the waist of a willing O'Haire housekeeper, and the mermaid program was born.

The tail I'm swimming in that night is much nicer than a tablecloth, and after a half hour of looking more like a cat in a bathtub than a mythical ocean creature, I finally start to feel like I'm working it. The next day I would be sore in ways I never could have dreamed of but tonight I'm having a blast. My only real mishap comes when I swim toward the window and bang my face into the glass, suctioning my right goggle so hard to my eye socket that it takes me a couple minutes to pop it free.

After a few more swoops and loops and "flexing" of "muscles," I decide to call it a night. Flopping out of the pool, I dry off and pull on my jeans. I'm exhausted. My sinuses feel bleached, and every light I see has a rainbow around it. In the bar I order up a well-earned pint of local Black Eagle IPA and watch the experts in the pool twist and glide effortlessly through the water. Venus sinks down to the bottom of the window, finds me at the bar, smiles and blows me a bubble kiss. I move to return the gesture, but let out a gasp. I wonder how long I've been holding my breath.

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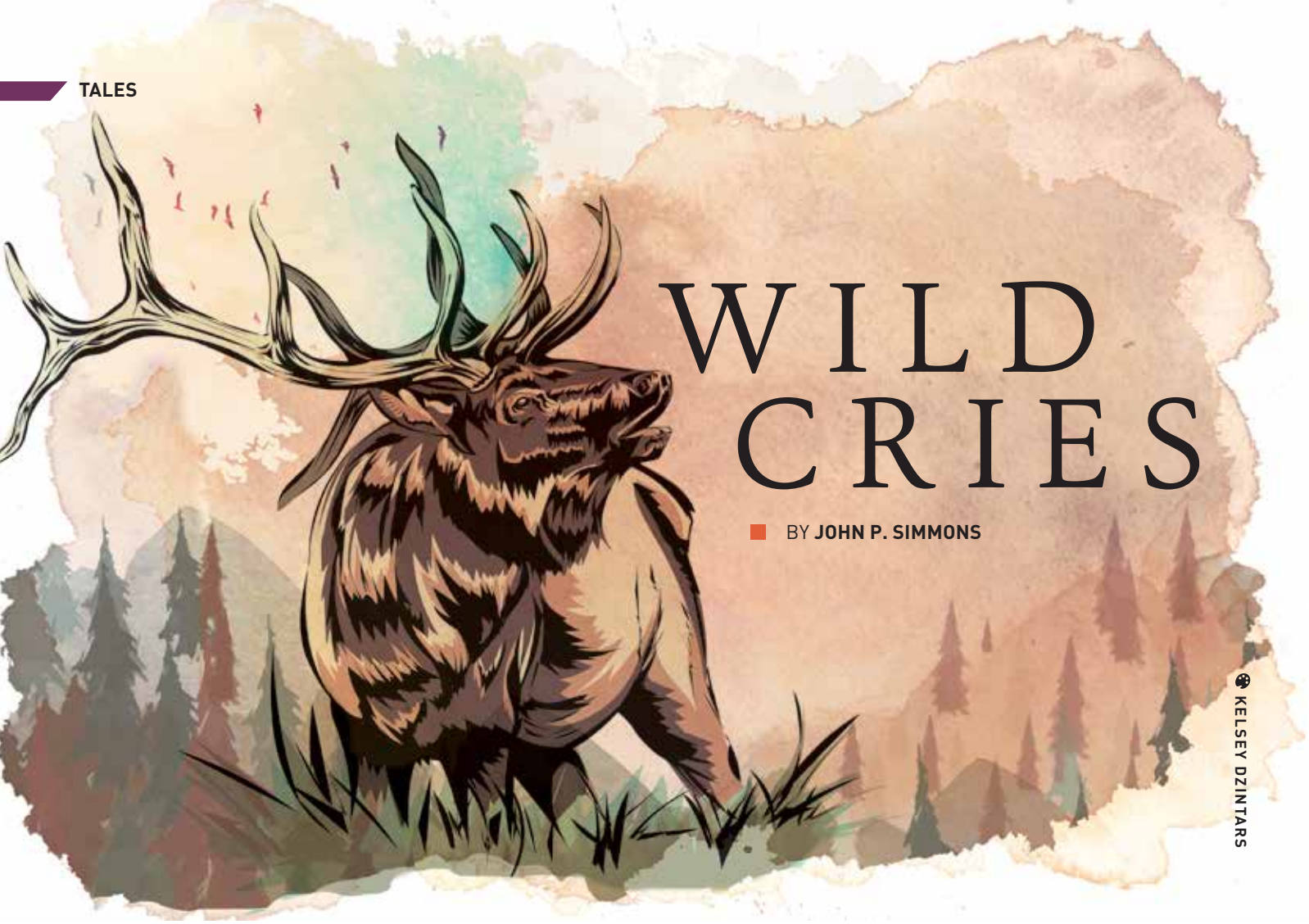

WILD CRIES

BY **JOHN P. SIMMONS**

KELSEY DZINTARS

One early fall evening as the sun was disappearing, I quietly rushed up a steep logging road to the comfort of my father's truck. Drifting into the stillness of the night, I paused at the ridgetop, taking a moment to catch a breath and gaze eastward admiring the first sliver of the rising moon.

In the next instant, the silence of this fresh night was shattered by a scream coming from just a few yards behind me, in the heavy brush where my sweaty scent had just drifted. For just a tick in time my feet froze but my heart raced.

This sound was like nothing I had heard before. I wasn't the only creature surprised at this moment: several blue jays roosting in the bushes nearby erupted into motion. As my startled feet began the run of my life, I was attacked by the noisy, awkward flight of the jays that joined me on the exit trail. We fled the mountaintop for better territory—a place far away from this mysterious train whistle coming from some unknown backcountry rail crossing. The unforgettable call of the wild was shocking. Yet it was beautiful.

This was the first time I heard the startling, magnificent bugle of a mature North American elk. I was quite young in life, just 13 years old, and living in the coastal woods of Northern California at the time. Like other cries in nature, the wapiti bugle leaves an enduring imprint on the soul.

I pause, deep in thought, when I hear the forlorn call of a loon in our continent's northern wetlands. That somber moment is overshadowed by the mournful call of the Rocky Mountain gray wolf calling to her missing partner, bringing on a shiver of apprehension to all listeners.

These lonesome cries disturb the evening stillness of our wild places, and are not soon forgotten. They, and their stirring night shadows, remind us that no matter how much we love the backcountry, sometimes all is not smiles.

One should always return to these special wild places, or at least to our memories of them.

Each fall, one who spends some time in our Rocky Mountain backcountry might still be blessed to hear many of these various territorial calls. I especially look forward to bugles of our noble Rocky Mountain elk. I pray the splendor of all of these backcountry sounds is something we never lose.

John P. Simmons, a commercial fabricator and blacksmith, has been exploring and hunting Montana's backcountry by horseback for 40-plus years. After his family was grown, he retired, in 2006. He has since devoted more time to writing and sculpturing metalwork with Native American symbology.

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NATURAL RETREATS

UNSCRIPTED ADVENTURE WITH FEATURED OUTLAW

Mandela van Eeden

BY **AMANDA EGGERT**

SOPHIE DANISON

Mandela van Eeden soaks up the last rays of sun on the Clark Fork river in Missoula.

During her 2010 commencement ceremony, Mandela van Eeden scrawled a list of things she wanted to do in the next 10 years on the back of her University of Montana diploma.

The timeframe is loose; really, the list is a compilation of adventures van Eeden—a lover of all things fuzzy—wants to have before she tames her travel itch and gets a dog.

Sea kayaking New Zealand's Milford Sound and biking around its South Island made the list. Traveling to India to study Ashtanga Yoga also appears, and van Eeden recently checked that one off. "It's been my dream my entire life to go to India," she says, her blue eyes showing some residual jetlag from the long flight back home to Missoula, Montana. "I've been in love with this country for my entire life, but I had yet to go there."

Two months abroad haven't sated her appetite for the spices, sounds, colors and people of India. And so the dream of owning a dog might have to wait for a while longer. Van Eeden feels certain she'll return to the bustling thrum of the world's largest democracy.

"I've been traveling all over the world for three decades and I feel more comfortable, more at home, more connected, and more accepted in India than I have anywhere else in the world," she says.

"Let me be clear," she continues. "I don't blend in—in any way—in India." Van Eeden's athletic 6-foot frame, blond hair and blue eyes are considered exotic many places she's traveled, and India was no different. Every so often, someone would stop her on the streets of Kovalam, the fishing village on the southwestern coast where she studied yoga, and ask for a picture; she would gracefully oblige.

Van Eeden thinks it must be India's near-constant threat of chaos that instead unspools into a "perfect flow" that appeals to her. Cambodia, Vietnam and parts of Africa also share that edge-of-chaos quality. "I've always connected with juxtaposition," she says. >>

MANDELA VAN EEDEN'S PARENTS NAMED HER after legendary South African president Nelson Mandela. Her father is South African and her mother is American, and her childhood was split between a game reserve on the southernmost tip of Africa and Billings, Montana, her mother Jeani van Eeden's home state. An international flight attendant, Jeani whisked her daughter around the world from a young age: Australia, New Zealand, China, South Korea, Vietnam, Argentina, Mexico. "We went everywhere that United Airlines flies," she says.

When van Eeden was 8, she was enamored with her father's didgeridoo hanging on the wall of their South African home.

"It would not have been good if I stayed out on the streets that night … [The didgeridoo] literally saved my life."

He told her not to play it, but his admonition had the opposite effect; van Eeden became fascinated and, at 18, got serious about learning the instrument.

Now she doesn't travel without it. In a world with too many languages to learn in a lifetime, van Eeden says music is an international language, humanity's common denominator. The didgeridoo is her skeleton key of choice. It's also gotten her out of a tight spot more than once.

A decade ago, van Eeden ran into money issues while traveling solo through Uruguay. Her bank canceled her ATM card under the assumption the charges from South America were fraudulent. Van Eeden couldn't convince them the expenses were hers.

With just a couple dollars left, she settled onto a cobblestone street in the old part of Colonia del Sacremento and started playing the didgeridoo. By the time darkness descended and the witching hour was well under way, she'd made a few friends and earned enough money for a night at a youth hostel and some empanadas.

"It would not have been good if I stayed out on the streets that night," she says. "That opened my eyes … [The didgeridoo] literally saved my life."

Left: Van Eeden likes to end yoga classes she teaches with a brief didgeridoo session.

Right: She has guided on the Grand Canyon with Outdoors Unlimited for four years.

IN SOME WAYS, VAN EEDEN IS REPAYING THAT DEBT NOW. During her recent India trip, she visited dozens of schools and introduced thousands of kids to the didgeridoo, all for free. "I think it's important to give your time," she says.

In the evenings, van Eeden traded the instrument for a microphone to conduct interviews with all manner of Indians for the radio show she hosts and produces.

Twice a week, "The Trail Less Traveled" airs on a Missoula radio station called The Trail. Van Eeden likes to open her interviews with the same question: "Where did you grow up and how was outdoor adventure part of your childhood?" She pays particular attention to how her guests have evolved in their chosen pursuits. Nobody is born an expert, she likes to point out; we were all beginners at one point.

During the three years she's produced the program, van Eeden's interviewed adventurers and athletes, scientists and conservationists including kayaking great Doug Ammons, and Pratik Patel, founder of the African Wildlife Trust. But it's not only the famous that interest van Eeden. She interviews men and women from all walks of life who share their hard-won wisdom.

"She's like a sponge," says Elizabeth Fricke, a senior assistant director of UM's Outdoor Program, and the woman who is largely responsible for introducing van Eeden to rafting and yoga. "She's humble … and she respects the [mentorship] process. She respects the old salt."

Neither instructing yoga nor hosting a radio show pays much, at least for the time being. (Van Eeden says she would eventually like to take her show to a national media outlet like NPR.) Fortunately, the job that supports her other endeavors is a good one. The past four summers, she has spent May through September as a Grand Canyon raft guide.

Van Eeden fell in love with rafting as a college freshman at UM. She went on a new student orientation trip down the Alberton Gorge of the Clark Fork and thought, "People get paid to do this? Where do I sign up?"

She didn't waste time. Van Eeden started volunteering with the UM Outdoor Program and it wasn't long before she was guiding on progressively more difficult stretches of whitewater on longer and longer trips: Class III, then IV, and finally V.

The winter after her college graduation, van Eeden moved back to Africa where she guided clients down some of the biggest whitewater she's ever run—in underinflated rafts and using old goat leads as ropes to secure gear.

When she left Montana for the Orange River Gorge on the border of South Africa and Namibia, she was in a still-new relationship, which made leaving difficult. She decided she had to go—raft guiding in Africa was her dream. "I didn't want to have love or a boy get in the way," she says.

But ultimately, that relationship brought her back to the States; after eight months overseas, she decided it was time. Van Eeden and her partner Wesley Harmon have been together for six years now.

A lifelong tinkerer with a background in physics and entrepreneurship, Harmon builds carbon fiber electric and bass guitars. He spent this past winter in Florida building a boat with his uncle.

Harmon shares van Eeden's outdoor inclinations and adventurous spirit, but she still finds value in the independence solo travel affords her. "I [am] able to really focus on spontaneity," she says. "I actually thrive when I'm traveling by myself."

She also thrives in Montana. Fricke says although there's something "wanderlusty" about van Eeden, she's still a grounded individual who places importance on family.

Last November, van Eeden and her mother invested in a 20-acre plot of land set in a larch forest and intersected by Butler Creek. One day it will be her home. "It's paradise," she says of the property just outside Missoula. "It's very quiet. There's wild turkey and whitetail deer and black bears and lots of elk."

Van Eeden says Missoula will remain her base camp for adventures near and far, but she wants to continue traveling—Fricke says it's "always been in her blood." One day she'll settle into the Butler Creek property with a dog. Just not yet.

COURTESY OF MANDELA VAN EDEN

In the last few years since living in Montana, I've become fascinated with the Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights. We don't get to see them often, either because of cloudy night skies or the geomagnetic storms aren't strong enough this far south in latitude. But when we do see them, the Bridger Mountains provide a spectacular backdrop. **MIKE CHILCOAT**

PHOTOS BY MATTHEW MILLMAN

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