

For my makers and those that have been made through me.

For the Old Stones.

And for my Laburu: Javier, Carm and Mika.



THE SHIPYARDS

UNPACKING OUR STORIES

I'm unpacking our stories. Yes, I am. The words are not yet on the page, not yet touched by the mild boredom of order. I cannot yet march up and down their table of contents and pass them to you for your review, my friendly audience. You need not fear that. I must ask you to join me in the disorder of memories that have been wrenched open, the air saturated with the dust of forgetting, the floor scattered with fragments, to join me among volumes that are seeing daylight again after an unmeasured patch of darkness or, perhaps, for the first time, so that you may be able to share with me a bit of the mood—it is certainly not an elegiac mood but, rather, one of anticipation—which these stories arouse in a sincere re-collector.

*With a deep bow to Walter Benjamin, his text
"Unpacking my Library," and to all those whose stories
I draw upon.*



Broken sheep jawbone, found on the roadside in Drangsnes, Iceland.

DEAD RECKONING

In navigation, dead reckoning is the process of calculating one's current position by using a previously determined position, or fix, and advancing that position based upon known or estimated speeds, over elapsed time and direction.

Dead reckoning is used in the absence of landmarks, astronomical observations, and electronic navigation systems.

Significant errors are common in dead reckoning as accuracy relies on knowing one's speed and direction at all times. When at sea, currents and winds can cause drift, contributing to miscalculations. Errors are cumulative.

Using other more reliable methods to get a new fix part way through the journey can significantly increase the accuracy of dead reckoning.

Reckoning is an accounting that can come in

the form of a calculation, an opinion, a belief, and a related consequence or conclusion. There is a sense in reckoning that the outcome relies on a bargaining process, on brokering a deal with a slippery set of evaluative variables.

I reckon the dead know something about reckoning.

ORIGINS

“Origin, although a thoroughly historical category, nonetheless has nothing to do with beginnings [...]. The term origin does not mean the process of becoming of that which has emerged, but much more, that which emerges out of the process of becoming and disappearing. The origin stands in the flow of becoming as a whirlpool [...]; its rhythm is apparent only to a double insight.”

—Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p83.

JUST BENEATH THE WEB

Great Great Grandmother Jane Dick was born on October 15th, 1836 in the town of Cullybacky, near Ballymena, north of Belfast in the north of Ireland. Her father was a small farmer and linen weaver. She went through the national schools of Northern Ireland

and became one of her father's linen weavers. In her son Harold's memoirs, he writes:

“Life in many families in these times was dominated and restricted by the severities of the covenanting Presbyterian Church of which body my mother’s father was a consistent member. They never left their window blinds up on the Sabbath. Each member of the family had to repeat one-half of the catechism one Sunday and the other half the next Sunday. My mother was allowed to read Pailey's *Evidence of Religion*, Baxter's *Saint's Rest*, Fox's *Book of Martyrs* and of course the Bible, but no novels. It was with many conscientious misgivings that mother's father allowed her to read that book of fiction, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. But there was a neighbour's son whose father had a broader outlook on life and allowed him to have Scott's works and Burns' poems and these books were surreptitiously loaned to my mother. She would keep Burns or Scott's *Lady of the Lake* or other poems just beneath the web of linen she was weaving where no one else would see it. As she plied her loom she gradually memorized the whole six cantos and many of Burns' gems. Her memory was good. In fact, up into her old age she could repeat no end of poems she had learned at the loom.”

WARP-WEIGHTED

The year is 1017 and the battle is raging in Ireland at Clontarf. We're in the north of Scotland, in Caithness, with our ears leaned up against the side of an old meeting place, the turf and stone bower of the Valkyries, weavers of fate. In setting up their loom, men's heads serve as loom weights, intestines as warp and weft, a sword as the sword-beater, and an arrow as the pin-beater.

Vítt er orpit
fyri valfalli
rifs reiðiský:
rignir blóði;
nú er fyri geirrum
grár upp kominn
vefr verþjóðar
er þær vinur fylla
rauðum vepti
Randvés bana.

Sjá er orpinn vefr
ýta þörmum
ok harðkléaðr
höfðum manna
eru dreyrrekin
dörr at sköptum
járnvarðr yllir
enn örur hrælat
skulum slá sverðum
sigrvef þenna.

[...]

Vindum vindum
vef Darraðar

[...]

—Darraðarljóð, chapter 157 of *Njáls saga*

Widely is flung
warning of slaughter,
the weaver's-beam's-web:
'tis wet with blood;
is spread now, grey,
the spear-thing before,
the woof-of-the-warriors
which valkyries fill
with the red warp-of-
Randvér's-banesman.

Is this web woven
and wound of entrails,
and heavy weighted
with heads of slain;
are blood-bespattered
spears the treadles,
iron-bound the beams,
the battens, arrows:
let us weave with our swords
the web of victory!

[...]

Wind we, wind we
the web-of-darts,

[...]

—*Translation by Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander*

WINTER SOLSTICE IN THE NORTH

It is the longest night and we are far north. We envisioned being joined by complete darkness but the full moon is seeping through the heavy cloud cover and the lights of the harbour bathe the room with their own reminder of our long-standing love affair with light. Breaking up is hard to do.

The recent days have been full—we've savoured our time in Árneshreppur, tasting the sweet beauty of sheep and waterfall, song and neighbourliness. Nothing needs to be claimed or known or planned now. It is time to rest, to wait, and listen.

I've brought Ch'te Woirrain along, the lovely handmade spindle set that I carry on behalf of the unknown. I pull her from her hide pouch and encourage her to dance. There is much she has heard and been witness to over the years. Another among us would like to try her hand at spinning and we introduce our spindles to each other. The whirling, whirling begins.

I am reminded of the Nornir and their hollows at the base of the tree of life, their staffs in hand, spinning the threads of fate, of the Old Paraskeva, the goddess of women's work and spinning, of the Woman in Blue and her woven tunic. I remember young hands braiding bracelets and older hands weaving sashes. I am remembering a girl who carried this spindle at a time when she was burdened with inexplicable pain.

I watch my spinning companion as she stands beside the flame we gather round now. Her shadow

sprawls across the wall and ceiling, caressing the air between her and us and all the others who have shown up.

Whirling, whirling, we call the sun back.



Ch'te Woïrrain - the drop spindle made by Christopher Roy

MOORED

A GEOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNTING

I work my way backwards through the memoirs and maps, cobbling together a list of the locations that my relations have occupied over the 250 or more years they have been in Ontario.

When I was born in Toronto in 1965, I came home to 140 Glenrose Ave. My parents, now in their 80s, still live there. During my art college days, I rented a couple of apartments—one at 116 Beaconsfield Ave. and the other at 300 Dovercourt Rd.—before becoming a part owner in a property at 1570 Dupont Street in collaboration with other family members. Twelve years later, in 2000, we moved to our current house at 406 Armadale Ave. This is the location that Elín Agla and I plan to introduce this publication.

Throughout my childhood my grandparents all lived in Toronto. My mother's parents, Helen and Don Patterson, lived at 93 Glenview Ave., which had been Helen's family home since 1926. My father's parents,

Paraskeva and Philip Clark, lived at 56 Roxborough Drive, which they bought in 1940. Prior to this they had rented several apartments—on Briar Hill Ave., Lonsdale Rd., Ferndale Ave., and at 52 Admiral Rd.—and had lived briefly in Philip's family home at 44 Willcocks St.

In the summers, Helen and Don welcomed family to their Island 132 property on Lake Temagami—off-the-grid cabins that they built in the 1950s. Philip's parents, Harold and Marguerite Clark, built a summer home near Milford Bay on Lake Muskoka in 1902, which the generations continued to enjoy until 2017.

Helen was born in Brockville where her family had homes at 60 Perth Street and on Park Street. Don was born in Newmarket where his family had properties at 152 and 154 Prospect Street and at the foot of Main Street. Philip's family was partly comprised of folks that had come up from the US and occupied several tracts of farmland in and around Vankleek Hill. They were eventually joined by Irish immigrants in the 1840s. The later 1800s brought a lot of movement with ministerial and teaching positions dictating location. My great grandfather, Harold, married Marguerite, whose origins were unknown having been left on the doorstep of a sanatorium in Cleveland, Ohio. She was the wild card of the family until Paraskeva came along. Paraskeva came from Russia, via Paris, arriving in Toronto in 1931.

Newtonbrook, Hawkesbury, L'Orignal, Longueuil, Kleinburg, Vaughan, Woodbridge, Aurora, Forks of the

Credit, Shelburne, Newmarket, Lake Eloida, Athens, Brockville, Hornings Mills, Toronto, Toronto, Toronto.

Looking solely at those relatives who are directly linked to me and whose records I can access at this time, it appears that there may be 25 properties that have been rented and 21 that have been owned, 17 of which have been sold.

I think about my position, its determination and the notion of a fix. In my youth, I could draw a map. And I was given a map that appeared to indicate my position, our position. What the map never showed was that we were on land that had been unjustly taken from First Nations people who had shared it in sustainable ways for thousands of years. The process of capitalistic colonization had insisted on privatization and privilege. There were many things we wondered about, but the rightful ownership of our properties was not one of them. Each one of these properties was a temporary fix that, with purchase, occupation, and sale, advanced our position economically and socially.

It has become one of the great heartbreaks of our generation—to come to a reckoning of the wrongdoings of our people, to come to the grief-soaked awakening that, as settlers, we gained the upper hand in such dishonourable ways. And, by extension, to consider the impact of not recognizing the wisdom of those who knew what this earth, this place, needed to be properly tended to. This is devastating. Sadly, the deepest effect is and will be felt most intensely by our children and grandchildren. We've been so foolish.

THE STORIES WE LIVE BY AND IN

“In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.”

—*Ben Okri*

93 GLENVIEW AVE.

Every other Sunday we went to Mormor and Grampie's for dinner. As we spilled into the living room, each of us taking our habitual positions—us kids on the floor by the games cupboard or drawing at the card table—the jug of bitter lemon soda and cranberry juice was poured into the small, smooth crystal glasses. A plate of Peek Freans with the red jelly centers circulated.

My father sat at the end of the couch, adjacent to the small stack of recent National Geographic Magazines. With my ear tuned to his utterances of amazement, I regularly jumped up from the floor, leaving my puzzles behind, to peer across the glossy

pages and into the worlds depicted. Evidence of the richness and plurality of a storied human existence lived in this space. Here exploration and beauty, hardship and belief, ingenuity and mystery performed a seductive dance.

As oil is on water, ink is on a page.

Called to the meal, we closed the magazines and the stories they portrayed, and gathered in the dining room. The end of the long modern table was pushed up against the window, featuring the view to the backyard and the bird feeders. We sat along either side with Mormor and Grampie taking their seats closest to the kitchen door. As my grandfather graced the meal with “For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful, in Christ's name, Amen,” we took comfort in the celery sticks and chicken fingers, enjoying every reliable bite.

“SO—WHAT DO I BELIEVE”

From my grandfather William Donald Patterson's notes written in the years leading up to his death, at the age of 94, on July 5, 2005.

“I believe God has entrusted a bit of his spirit to all of us and it matters what we do with it. Some will be able to do more than others, Jesus a whole lot.

I hope, as relatively new people on the block, mankind will accomplish whatever God hopes we can do—before the sun runs out of energy in the next 5,000,000,000 years and his Spirit must abide elsewhere.”

—

“Faith = Belief and Truth In and Loyalty to (Oxford Dictionary)

1. There are two (maybe more) kinds of things that are real:

(a) material things—me, the Universe and all its inhabitants and contents

(b) spiritual things—a mother's love, for example

2. Mankind has intelligence

We may be the new kids on the block—its only, maybe, 3,500,000 years since Lucy walked about in Africa whereas the Big Bang was about 14,000,000,000 years ago. Since then our universe's matter has been expanding, forming galaxies, stars, planets, comets etc. And on at least one planet, over 4,500,000,000 years had acquired abundant water and developed living things from single cells, through trilobites for over 100,000,000 years, dinosaurs over [...]

In the last 50,000-100,000 years man has developed a conscience.

In the last 10,000 years mankind has developed agriculture.

In the last 500 years mankind has discovered many of the mathematical laws on which the universe operates, many of the ways plants and animals grow; how genetics operates (DNA etc.)

3. Since mankind has been able to (privilege) learn all this we can only believe that there is an overall, even more intelligent 'creator'; 'mastermind' powerful beyond all our present comprehension 'who' means that we be here.

4. This leads me to believe that all mankind has a responsibility to use its intelligence to carry on conscientiously with the highest endeavour it can envisage even though we do not know the ultimate goal.

5. I believe that I must be loyal to this search even though it is unknowable to us just as the 'beginning' of it all (How come—void, space, time, some forms of matter—were 'available' at the beginning for the master 'creator'?)”

CLAY

During my childhood, we made many things. My parents had both graduated from U of T Architecture in 1959 and had lived in Denmark for a year, so the interior of our typical 1920s Toronto house was slowly but dramatically being converted to a woody modernist haven. Every Christmas the family engaged in making cards by carving Lino blocks or cutting and stacking paper to make low relief printed images. We sewed and knitted, wired and plumbed, sketched and photographed. It was all part of a way of life that rendered our story physically.

We listened to music and played instruments, not as a deep study but as a way to relax. We cooked and baked, not to become master chefs but to eat well.

In the late 1960s my mother developed a practice of working with clay. Eventually she came to have a wheel and kiln in the basement. She made tiles for the kitchen, hanging flowerpots, and many types of vessels. She employed a beautiful little form, carved by a dear friend from soapstone, to press her initials into the clay.

One day, quite recently, I asked her about the possibility of making more of her small shot-sized cups that I had always admired. She shook her head. "We would never be able to make those again." She explained, "I gathered the clay in the David Balfour Ravine and I made my own glaze out of the ashes of various things I burned. It would be impossible to reproduce them."

My admiration for my mother has only deepened as we have aged. I think back to those days, three kids in tow, and the thrall of change swirling around her. She was holding down a full-time job at Metro's Transportation Plan Review, doing house renovations for friends, while my Dad started running his own architectural photography business out of the basement. And in her 'spare time', going to the ravine, digging up the clay, concocting and testing her unique glaze formulations. *And pressing her stamp into the world we touched.*

We talked about making more cups together, anyways. "They don't have to be exactly the same," I suggested. And she replied, "I think they should be a little bigger."

CHURCH DOCK ROAD

The Muskoka property was in our family for 119 years. At one point, we almost lost access to it when my great grandfather Harold willed it to the University of Toronto. He had purchased the initial land from local residents in 1898 and built the boathouse and cottage shortly thereafter. His favourite son Ralph, my grandfather Philips's younger brother, drowned in the lake in 1942 when he had an epileptic seizure while out in the rowboat. The next year, as Harold faced his own death, it seems he preferred that the cottage be given away rather than letting his less

favourite son continue to enjoy it. Harold willed the property and his estate to the U of T. Philip and my father approached the U of T and managed to arrange to keep the cottage and the estate for the benefit of the next two generations. Philip continued to escape to the cottage, often on his own, until his death in 1980.

In Philip's lifetime, he would have experienced significant changes to the Muskoka experience. Up until 1916, or so, the cottage was only accessible by boat. Trunks of goods would be sent north by train to Bala at the beginning of the season and the family, along with a maid, would make their way up for the summer. Harold would return to the city to work during the week and return each Friday for the weekend. Local people and services were employed in the care and running of the property. This way of life ended with Harold's generation.

When the more recent generations took over in 1980, it was another kettle of fish. Muskoka had become increasingly high-profile over the years as a vacation haven for the wealthy and famous. With this, property values and taxes increased dramatically. Land that my great grandparents had purchased for \$75, produced annual tax bills nearing \$10,000. In order to keep the property in the family we began renting it out in July and August.

The annual routine was to open the cottage on the May 24th weekend and begin cleaning and repairs in preparation for July, check the cottage between renters, and return in September for a weekend or two, with

final closing at Thanksgiving. Any time we could get away in July and August would be spent opening, maintaining, closing, and enjoying my mother's family place in Temagami.

Many wonderful times were had in Muskoka. She was a grand old lady, with a massive skirt of a porch that wrapped around the main floor. Swinging benches made for the most contemplative and restful naps, and the big stone fireplace was a primary gathering spot. The 1903 long, wooden launch made for enchanting sunset cruises. The old starched white sheets were so cold and crisp when you climbed into bed they felt wet at first but under the heavy wool blankets and homemade quilts we slept well.

For many years we debated over the future of Muskoka, constantly wrestling with how we could keep her going. And in the meantime, there were trees to fell, wood to chop, roofing to repair, docks to be rebuilt and the launch to be raised and lowered in the boathouse. In many ways, these tasks brought us together as a family and gave us a common purpose. Sometimes they created conflict. We had many challenges and bumps along the way.

One of our regular concerns was the ability of the septic system to handle the demands of groups of renters. At various points, we considered putting a new system in but bringing anything new into the cottage usually came with a great degree of hesitation and grief, not to mention invoices. So one fall, I ended up assisting my father with digging up, cleaning out,

and relaying the old septic tile bed.

During that weekend, I wrote a poem.

FOR NOW, I KNOW THIS PLACE

Muskoka, October 4, 2010

We have been called back here again
A diagnostic test of our hopeless hopefulness
That we may remain at a distance
And sit back in swinging slumberness

The felted layers of earth are severed and lifted
Her hair has grown long and tangled
Holding tight to her piles of fallen teeth
As we break bread we consider breaking blood

As I scratch the backs of the old clay makers
I sift through time, separating the elements
The achiness in her bones seeps in to mine
And I revel in the uneasiness of it all

Laid to rest in their proud grey flannels
The old ones lie waiting
To be buried again in service
To our unseen trail of effluence

For now, I know this place.

THE MAKALIKA

Written by my father, Clive Harold Clark, Fall 2012

“The *Makalika* has served the Clark cottage at Church Dock Rd., Milford Bay for the last 109 years. The boat is named after my grandmother, Marguerite Clark, who taught in the 1890's in Hawaii. *Makalika* was the adaptation of Marguerite in Hawaiian.

The *Makalika* was actually one of many inboard motor boats designed and built by Scott J. Matthews of the Matthews Boat Company of Port Clinton, Ohio and sold under the Lozier name. The Lozier Company of Plattsburg, NY were famous for high quality automobile and marine engines and, based on a Lozier ad of the period, the launch as delivered was powered by a one cylinder 3 HP Lozier inboard engine.

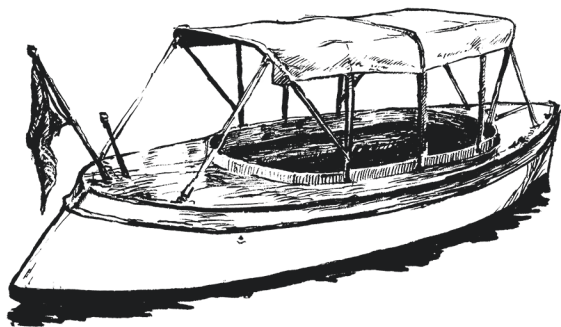
In 1903, my grandfather, Dr. Harold Clark, had just built the first phase of his family cottage on Church Point, Milford Bay, Lake Muskoka, and as there were no roads as yet, he needed more than the canoe and Aykroyd sailing dingy to visit friends and commute to Bala to catch the train to and from work in Toronto.

He saw the Lozier being displayed in May 1903

as a working demonstrator on Toronto Bay, and being impressed by its appearance, quality and the quietness of its underwater exhaust system, purchased it and ordered that it be delivered to the Muskoka Wharf in Gravenhurst on May 24th of that year. My grandfather and my four-year-old father got off the train at the wharf to find the launch dockside, got in and drove it to the cottage, some 14 miles north, at Milford Bay.

This was coordinated with a move and expansion of the boathouse to include a suitable slip complete with screw jacking equipment to raise and lower the launch each winter and spring.

My father, Philip T. Clark, and his brother Ralph were taught to drive the boat, and at ages 10 and 8 respectively, would drive it each Friday



The Makalika

across the lake to Bala to pick up Harold at the train from Toronto and return across the Lake to Church Point after dark.

The Makalika hull is 21' with a 7' beam and is of carvel construction using 5/8" cypress on oak ribs capped by a red oak coming and deck. Based on my viewing of photos of other Lozier launches of the period, I suspect it was delivered with an oval fringed canvas roof supported on four vertical posts. At some point, I suspect very early after delivery, Harold had this replaced by a canvas roof system on wood frames complete with side curtains for rain and spray protection, giving the launch a much more modern appearance.

The hull was maintained over the years by Bob Pridday who did a major restoration of the Makalika in the 1960s. He rebuilt the stern and refinished the deck.

The Makalika is now powered by a 4-cylinder 25 HP Kermath Sea Cub engine. The only evidence that exists as to its installation date is the operating manual that is dated 1938. The Kermath Sea Cub engine was installed by Norman Scholey, who served in England in WW1 as an aircraft Mechanic servicing Sopwith

Camel fighter aircraft. Norm maintained the Kermath until he retired in the late '60s when he taught me how to take care of the Kermath in terms of winterizing and spring start up.

In the fall of 2005, I discovered that considerable dry rot had returned to the flat underside of the bottom area under the pointed stern. With help from Nicholas Turnbull, we rebuilt the pointed stern of the boat in the spring and fall of 2006. In 2011, with the assistance of Stan Hunter and Stephen Brunton, I converted the engine's electrical system from 6 to 12 volt."

ISLAND 132

It must have been in the early 70s, when I was 8 or 9, that Mormor came to tuck me in while I was staying in the little sleeping cabin. We sat together by the window in the fading light and I asked her if she was afraid of dying.

"No," she said. "I've lived so much longer than I ever imagined I would."

She held her hands up for both of us to look at. "These hands that we are given," she said, "they are so remarkable. There is so much we can do because of them—it's simply amazing. I have been so blessed." And with that she said goodnight.

I was blessed by her hands throughout my childhood. She made a pair of knitted red wool pants for me that I loved to wear. She baked upside-down pineapple cake and played the piano. But more than anything I was blessed by her spirit, by having been seen by her and by having her say to me, “So tell me, how are you?”—and really want to know. I’m not sure I had much to say back at the time. I often felt a little tongue-tied. And it seemed more natural for me to draw or make something that would convey my presence and my capacity. And would, I hoped, make her feel blessed by me.

A SLOW RECKONING

A text I wrote about my grandmother, Paraskeva Clark, and her 1933 painting, “Myself.”

I had never trusted paintings. This didn’t mean I had never been temporarily enticed or entranced by paintings’ seductions. I certainly had. But, as an artist, I had never been able to wade through the seemingly limitless layers of trickery and deception embedded in paintings’ mechanisms, history, and ubiquitous acceptance as a reliable device of communication. Painting and paintings, I believed, would never lead me to any real truth.

Paraskeva is said to have lived a life of contradiction. Her Russian ancestry tells a story of a double faith; hers

is a people who maintained strong pagan faiths and rituals while adopting Christianity, a people whose expansive land and history straddled both Eastern origins and the allure of the West. With one hand tied to her peasant and socialist roots and the other to her refined capacity for eloquence and expression among artists and intellectuals, Paraskeva occupied a threshold between two profound commitments. It seems she lived a long and laboured life struggling to keep both faiths alive.

I've come to see her painting, *Myself*, as a sculpture. Its timber bones and stretched field of flax linen, both unseen and protected, support an outer skin that faces us. On this skin lies the self-determination of Paraskeva, living in a thin, taut moment between death and life, elegance and vulnerability, both 'holding her own' and drawing us into her exotic mystery.

Painted when she emerged in Toronto, having come from the East, she is facing a new day, a new life, pregnant, with my father. It is 1933 and she is 35. She stands in a doorway, a portal between a darkened room and a more neutral, unembellished but light-filled space that illuminates her. She is poised, strong, alluring.

The portrait is exhibited several times in the 1930's. It hangs in her house for 42 years while she makes the long journey across the vast plains of her life. She applies for a Guggenheim fellowship and doesn't get it. Her son is ill. Her garden brings her joy. Her grandchildren are born. She gives us candy before dinner, wheels the TV cart into the dining room, tries

to get us to drink beer. I hide under the table after every meal. In the spring, the flowers begin to grow and she talks to them... and paints them.

In 1974, at the age of 76, there is a knock on her door by a young Charles Hill, the National Gallery's new Curator of Post-confederation Canadian Art, labouring over his own life's work. He includes four of her works in the groundbreaking exhibition *Canadian Paintings in the Thirties* and two of her works are purchased by the Gallery for respectable sums. He chooses her self-portrait as the banner work for the entire exhibit. Paraskeva steps into our history books.

I am reminded of Paraskeva's lament on the difficulty for women to make great art because they can't "close the key on the door from everything". *Myself*, and the story it has come to reveal, testifies to the doorway itself having become her home, the place she occupied in her wrestle and love affair with life itself. Curiously, *Myself* has told a truth the artist, herself, never intended to reveal.

LEAVING PORT

SHIFTING BASELINES

Shifting baseline is a term that refers to the changing perception of what is 'natural' that occurs with each new generation. The conditions we are born into become a reference point against which we gauge change. When my kids were growing up we finally succumbed to buying them smart phones when the younger one started high school. A few years later I was sitting in a restaurant with my older one and they remarked on a 5 year old at the next table playing on his phone. "What kind of a childhood is he going to have?" they asked. "Is he going to play outside at all?" I had to smile. Every generation seems to recalibrate the norm and it usually means advancing the baseline to a more contemporary register.

I estimate that the perception of history in the Canadian context is shifting differently. In my youth,

textbook lessons started with a one-paragraph nod to the original inhabitants of the land and then plunged headlong into the relatively recent pursuits of the French and British to extract resources, claim land and settle colonies. Today this baseline has shifted dramatically backwards with acknowledgements that the Indigenous peoples of the land, that has come to be known as Canada, were living sustainably throughout its expanses for thousands of years. The past is in front of us as we begin to recognize the massive losses and hardships that have been incurred through colonization.

THE STORIES WE WANT TO TELL

It seems that in most families, communities, and nations there are the stories we want to privilege and those we prefer to forget or not hear in the first place. The ones that get told over and over tend to take on a glow that comes with the polish of repeated use.

Often other people's stories seem more interesting than our own. Being able to clearly see our own story is aided by leaving home, gaining some distance from what is known. Exposed to difference, the tangled complexity of self and other complicates and enhances our perceptions.

Returning home can bring relief, rejoice and restlessness. And an unresolvable reckoning.

MORMOR

The year my grandmother Mormor died my mother had been away travelling in the Arctic with my father. It was May and stormy weather had prevented her from flying down when she received the sad and unexpected news. In the smooth efficiency of the funeral home and church protocol, my grandfather proceeded through the visitation and ceremony in my mother's absence. The next weekend we all gathered for the routine Sunday dinner at the house and sat in our usual spots at the table.

My mother suddenly dissolved into tears. "I can't believe she's not here anymore. Just like that," she sobbed. "I can't believe she's gone." And with that my grandfather burst into tears.

MEASURING TIME

The Old Contraption still holds mystery: A hand-crafted crucifix shaped box, maybe 4 feet long, hollow inside with a pin hole at one end. Cemented moorings near the shoreline with inset brass plates to secure a coupling. Hinged fasteners to allow for the adjustment of angle. A once-reflective metal plate now tarnished. And faded lists of numbers charted with the utmost care. For my ancestors, telling time was a skilled and scholarly pursuit. One might say, an obsession.

And on the sundial reads a quote from William Cowper, written in 1824:

“Time, as he passes us,
has a dove's wing,
Unsoil'd, and swift,
and of a silken sound.”

THE PLAQUE

*JEDER WILL ALT WERDEN
KEINER WILL ALT SEIN*

I first saw the plaque in Mrs. Opfermann's home. Alfonse made it by cutting a thick plank of solid wood in a more-organic-than-elliptical shape, rounding its edges committedly, and applying deep brown stain and multiple coats of varnish to achieve an ultra-smooth, lustrous finish. Two eyehooks were inserted into its upper edge and a yellow strand of yarn ran through both to allow the plaque to hang on a simple nail. Small black and gold aluminum angle-cut letters, the type found on your roadside mailbox or the bathroom door at the gas station, floated across its glossy face.

On the day I visited Mrs. Opfermann, she sat below the plaque at her kitchen table. Her eyesight was poor, her hearing somewhat compromised, and her joints cracked loudly as she pulled herself up to

her walker. Her mind, nonetheless, was sharp and her heart—it was wide open.

“Thank you so much for coming. It will be good for Jennifer to get away.” she reflected. “Your sister is an angel. I don't know what I would do without her.” What had once been a gardening gig, and then a snow-shovelling gig, had grown into a day-to-day personal care job for my sister as Mrs. Opfermann had become more and more housebound.

After getting her some breakfast and preparing lunch for later in the day, I sat for a few minutes and chatted. As Mrs. Opfermann recounted a little of her life's details, my eyes were drawn to the plaque and I gingerly expressed my curiosity. “Alfonse made that a few years before he died” she said. “It says: Everyone wants to grow old. Nobody wants to be old.”

FOG AND DRIFT

UNSPEAKABLE

“With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that has gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.”

—Walter Benjamin, in *The Storyteller*, 1936

I AM SO AFRAID OF WORDS

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I AM SO AFRAID OF WORDS

I see Tal's poster announcing her exhibition and wonder what her fear of words stems from. I find myself making my way across town to go and see the show. She has produced a small, spiral-bound publication whose pages alternate between two stories. Where the stories begin and end, and how they weave together, is up for grabs. In the text, she seems to be wandering the streets of Berlin, reaching out for a connection to her grandmother, and tracing the thoughts that come to her.

“ [...] We say, God said let there be light, and then there was light. But it's not speech as we know it. God, in this story, has no mouth, voice nor tongue, it's celestial being, beyond our human scope of understanding. Yet, in our physical realm, words create reality. I am so afraid of words.

North Americans use language as tools for oppression. In order to reverse oppression, we delete words from our reality, replacing offensive words with coded letters. N-words, R-words,

F-words. There's a known, unwritten, set of rules deciding who can and who absolutely cannot use these words, and whoever chooses to break these rules does it knowingly, aware of repercussions.

In Hebrew, words are too few and too precious to obliterate. [...]"

—*Tal Sofia, 2019*

DEAD QUIET

From a recent conversation with my mother, Mary Florence Clark.

"I never really computed that you grew up living with your grandfather."

"It was his house and he gave the house to my mother when she married my dad." "But, it was never really hers. That's why she was so delighted with Temagami. It was the first house they had ever had together."

"What was it like growing up with AJ in the house? Your whole childhood you would have had your grandfather at all the events, the meals and everything."

“Basically it was very quiet. We didn't discuss anything. I never learned how to strike up a conversation with anybody. It was dead quiet. His bedroom was in the den upstairs. He had the little balcony at the back. When Mr. Anglin came to visit, or whatever, they'd be in the living room, sitting around talking. But there was no discussion. Not about current events or anything like that.

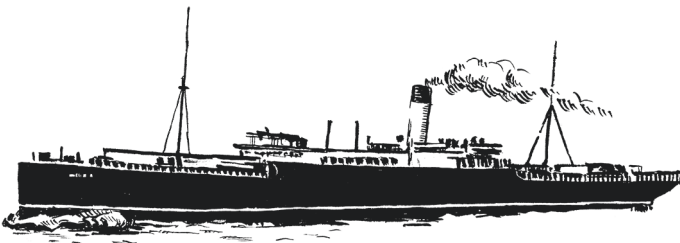
“I can remember that when I was getting married they had a party at the house, in the living room, and mom and dad had asked Ted Johnson, the minister, to toast the bride, or give as speech about the bride... and so he cornered me in the living room and he wanted to talk to me about this or that. Well, I squirrelled out of that in a hurry! I couldn't talk to people. I never learned how to talk to guests. Other than just the pleasantries.”

“It was a weird upbringing. My mother never argued with my father. If she was upset about something she shut herself in the kitchen and you could hear her crying.”

CROSSING IN 1907

From my grandfather Philip Clark's Memoirs, 1974.

“Coming home from Scotland that summer was a matter of some experience. We came down the Clyde past the Mull of Kintyre and the North of Ireland. It was cloudy; there was no appearance of the sun or of the stars during the whole of that Atlantic crossing. The storm gradually increased in severity until the ship was rolling in the most alarming manner. I can remember the plate barriers placed on the dining tables so that the dishes would not slide off on to the passengers or on to the floor. However, when they served soup, there was nothing to stop it from spilling over. At the end of every meal the tables were a mess. In the lounge the chairs were screwed to the floor. I can remember



S/S Sicilian, Allan Line, the boat of Philip Clark's 1907 crossing.

that it was more fun to play sitting on the floor with the other children. On one occasion when the ship took a very alarming roll, we all slid across the floor to the side of the lounge and several adults who were sitting in stationary chairs that faced the wall toward which we were sliding fell out of their chairs and slid too. It was really a memorable experience.

Very shortly after this the ships engines stopped; we were informed by one of the stewards that according to 'dead-reckoning' we were six miles out from the straight of Belle Isle. It was raining, the fog was thick.; icebergs were all around us and it was considered too dangerous to try entering the Straight at that late hour in the day which was about 4 P.M. However, by some miracle, we were only stopped for half an hour when the weather began to clear. The sun came out and the extraordinary "dead-reckoning" of the navigation of that ship from the North of Ireland over to the entrance to the Straight of Belle Isle was so accurate that instead of being 6 miles out we were only 5 miles. The engines started again and we went through the Straight that afternoon. The next morning when we woke up I remember my brother Ralph looking out the porthole and shouting, "We're in Canada!" It was a bright clear sunny day."

CATCH AND KILL

Ron is in my kitchen regaling me with the antics and atrocities of the political situation in the times of Trump. I admit, I pay little attention to current affairs, but hearing Ron render each chapter with such animation draws me in.

He uses the phrase 'catch and kill'. This is a technique, he explains, that is used to prevent information that can be damaging to someone else from becoming public, presumably to protect allies. The story is purchased and never published. The seller of the story agrees to remain silent. Different from bribing someone with 'hush money', catch and kill is practiced by the media, and the target, who the information is about, may not be aware that his or her information will be kept secret.

I reflect on the story written in Leslie Marmon Silko's book, *Ceremony*. In a witches' "contest in dark things" the top prize is taken by a storytelling. The story conjures such fear that the witches who have heard it ask that it be "called back" at the end of the game. The victor replies "It's already turned loose. It's already coming. It can't be called back."

Stories are wild. Can we really catch and kill them?

THE STORYTELLER

We're deep into the coldest days of winter and I am quite happy to be at my home desk, putting in the long hours of work on my thesis. Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay, *The Storyteller*, has become central to my exploration and I'm excited about weaving his work together with the thoughts of other writers I am drawn to. Things are unfolding in an unexpectedly magical way and the quiet and peaceful days at home feel like a genuine gift. There is a lot to listen for.

Jennifer is going away again and asks if I can fill in with Mrs. Opfermann. I welcome the request. I've been meaning to make a visit for weeks and I recognize that, at the age of 98, the opportunity to see Mrs. Opfermann is not something I can take for granted.

This time, the wooden plaque Alfonse made hangs inside her door at the Westburn Manor, a city-run long-term care facility in Toronto's west end. Much has changed for Mrs. Opfermann; leaving her long-time home, her garden, and the bulk of her belongings has been tumultuous. When I say hello, it takes a moment for her to register who I am, but as she does she breaks into her usual broad grin. It's good to see that her spirited nature is still with her.

I wheel Mrs. Opfermann to lunch in the dining room and get her set up at her usual spot. Mario, an elderly Portuguese man who has had a stroke, is on her left and a new resident, Lila, is on her right. Lila is asleep in her wheelchair when she is brought in

by the nurses and they are repeatedly trying to wake her up and get her to eat. I find the scene disturbing. There are at least 30 folks in the room and everyone has their own struggles and issues. June has severe dementia and is wandering around and continually calling out for help. An older man, who is quite agile and jovial, is circling the room and tapping folks on their shoulders from behind and laughing uproariously. The staff are doing their best to get all the food and medications administered properly, but are clearly frustrated and irritated with each other and with some of those they are caring for. Of course, it could be worse. But I can't pretend I'd ever want to see one of my parents here. And Mrs. Opfermann? She may have trouble with her joints, her hearing and her sight but her mind is clear and she doesn't miss a trick. It is hard to see her in this place.

It is a relief to get back to her room and settle in amongst her personal possessions again. We chat for a while. The nurse, Iryna, arrives to treat Mrs. Opfermann's eye. It been red and could be infected. The nurse explains that these things are typical in the home.

I'm preparing to depart, explaining to Mrs. Opfermann that I need to get back to my school work.

"What are you working on?" she asks.

I tell her that I am studying Criticism and Curatorial Practice, that it's an art-related field. "At the moment, I am reading a text by Walter Benjamin," I say. "He's a German writer."

Mrs. Opfermann lights up. "Benjamin, Benjamin..." she ruminates. "Walter Benjamin. I recognize that name!"

"He wrote in the 1930's in Germany." I tell her.

"Where was he born?" she asks.

"I think it was Berlin." I consult Wikipedia and give her a few details of his history.

"I'm going to have to think about this," she says, "I'm going to have to remember him."

I leave her bedside elated.

Too many days pass before I am able to visit again. This time I go in the evening, during the hours that Jenny says are long and lonely for Mrs. Opfermann. She's confused as to who I am but once she makes the connection she shakes her head and gives me her famous smile. "You came to see me when you didn't have to?" she exclaims. "That is so, so nice."

"I thought I might be able to read to you," I tell her.

I sit beside her bed as close as I can get and begin to read Benjamin's *The Storyteller* to her, hoping she might recognize it but she has trouble making out the story. Not only is it hard for her to track the logic of the long and complicated sentences but, lying on her side in the bed, her good ear is against the pillow, making it even harder for her to hear. I realize that reading to her is futile.

I change my tact and tell her about what I am reading. "Benjamin is talking about why we lost our ability to tell stories," I say. "He says that one of the

reasons is that during the First World War it was so horrific, it was so horrible, that when people came back from the battlefield they were silent.”

“That is true, that is true.” Mrs. Opfermann replies. “The First World War was the reason that the Second World War came. The people didn’t want to talk anymore. There were so many people that lost their lives, that came from all sides. And the main thing is, for the storyteller, he couldn’t speak out what he was really thinking of that person who dictated us. He came from Austria, not from Germany, and you had to be so careful. If somebody would say something, like the storyteller, he would be right in jail.”

“Benjamin is saying that there was so much destruction it was unspeakable.”

“You know, about that time my mother used to say, “it looked like our life had ended every day.”

Our conversation is interrupted by the nurse checking in and Mrs. Opfermann requests some help with her eye. It’s getting better but is still not quite right. While we wait we continue talking.

“In the second part Benjamin talks about there being two kinds of storytellers. One is the person who goes away on a trip and comes back with stories and the other kind is people who stay at home and know the local stories, the stories of the place they are from.”

Mrs. Opfermann’s mouth is dry and I get her some water.

“The storyteller. We say *schriftsteller*.”

“I wish I could read this to you in German,” I say.

“Do you think you would be able to understand it more easily if you were hearing it in German?”

“Well, if you hear your mother tongue, then it is easier. Definitely. The time comes that you are getting that old, and so long time ago, that you reach your mother tongue. But it doesn't matter. I hope that my English is so, that you can understand what I am saying.”

“Do you remember growing up with storytellers?”

“My God. That is so long ago. I'm thinking. Even when I went to school, what kind of stories did she tell me?” Mrs. Opfermann begins recalling. “You have to be careful when you go in the forest, in the wild. If you go in the wild then there is the mean man, the storyteller will tell you, that you have to learn properly otherwise he will punish you.”

“When you actually went into the forest or into the wild did you...”

“I've never been afraid! I was never afraid.” Mrs. Opfermann chuckles a little hearing herself say it. “We were living out in the forest, far outside from the town, or from the city. People would say to us, ‘We would be afraid! We wouldn't go there!’ But I wasn't. I was fearless. That was the way I was during the Second World War too. I was fearless then too.”

“Really! You never felt scared as a nurse on the front line?”

“I was just thinking about the Russians. The Russian soldier got kept by the Germans and he was so scared. I said, ‘You don't have to be scared. I'm

not going to kill you.' I said, I wouldn't even know. People are people. This was my understanding." She pauses. "And even when they put me in jail, I wasn't scared. My sister-in-law, she was so scared, she was crying. I said 'Don't cry, Modeya. Don't cry. You will see.' They were pushing me—pushing me with their rifle but I wasn't scared."

"Really! How did you end up in jail?"

"Because I went over the border at that time when I was already over 20. I was married at the time. It was the Second World War. That was when Germany was at the bottom. So many young people left, and died. You know, people didn't have anything to wear. At least, if one of us had to get out of clothes to wash them, that person had to stay as long as possible in bed while they were getting dry. That is a story by itself. If you tell that today, they start laughing. This couldn't be possible. But it was possible. This was a story. Oh yeah. There are so many different things that had to be done."

"Do you want some more water?"

"Yeah, I can't speak too much anymore. My mouth is getting too dry."

"And it's getting late at night too! Maybe you are getting tired."

"Okay. I think slow but sure, we have to stop. And I don't mind, if you would come maybe another time again? Maybe when I am a little bit more clear in my mind."

"Yes, I can come more often. I would love to hear

more of your stories."

"I'm the REAL storyteller," she says, laughing.

"Yes!" I concur, and we both laugh. "You are the very real storyteller, I agree!"

As I made my way to leave we spoke about the time of day and my travels home.

"If you are wandering around during the night, aren't you afraid?" she asks.

"No, I'm not afraid of that." I say.

"I'm telling you, right now, after all that I have gone through, and I am here now. I am afraid. I wouldn't go out in the night anymore. Life changed."

THE LAST RUN

By my niece, Monica Mazurkiewicz.

It was fall. The maple leaves were as red as the Precambrian shield they fell onto, twisting and turning through the crisp breeze. The sun was low in the sky, "Just an hour left," I called out, using my palm and the horizon for reference. My family bustled, bundling ourselves, everyone laden with things we wanted and nothing we needed; wool blankets, beer bottles, hors-d'oeuvres, cameras. It was our last boat ride of the year. Tomorrow the cottage would be closed and we'd return to the city for winter. We piled aboard, seven people connected by blood and

shared moments, nothing more.

The boat ride was a moment we had shared many times before. We drifted comfortably off into the known, reliving what we had lived and shared so many times before. We were in a state of bliss and harmony. A precious state for any family, a moment too valuable to break. So when Grandpa said, "Let's go back," we scoffed at him. "No! Just a bit more. A bit further! Just around this island," we wheedled.

The sunset was magnificent as we came about the island. Streaks of fire lighting up the sky as we drifted through the calm waters. Suddenly, a ROAR came from below our feet and the boat teetered side to side. We had run aground. We were shipwrecked.

We all jumped into action in opposing and diverging ways. We acted as we lived—individually. Grandpa fiddled with the engine as Granny searched for a phone, Auntie began pulling out life jackets as Mum tore up the floorboards, my cousins climbed on to the stern of the boat as I jumped overboard. Everyone was talking and no one was listening.

A sober silence came over us as the sun slipped beneath the horizon. It was in the twilight that

we paused, we sat, we came together, huddling for warmth as we waited for the rescue boat. The wind picked up, and the waves grew taller. It was cold, it was dark, and our boat was as firmly beached on the rock as ever, tipping side to side. The lake was empty and not another living soul could be seen but for us seven.

It was pitch black when they came. Seven men pulled from their Thanksgiving dinners in a state-of-the-art metal boat, pulled us from ours. The boat had lights and GPS, a far cry from our ancient wooden beauty. I took the flag as we left our boat, the woollen pennant clasped in my grip, more precious to me than anything else in that moment.

That was the last family boat ride in the launch. A new end to an old memory. One more knot tying our family together.

A LEAKY BOAT

RECKONING IN REAL TIME

I remember listening to Elizabeth Gilbert sharing her thoughts on the changing notion of genius over time. Today, she said, we think of people as being geniuses. In ancient Greece they understood that one could have a genius. The genius was an animate entity, an alibi perhaps, or maybe a companion. Your genius was something that you listened to and for—something outside of yourself.

The etymology of genius traces this shift. What was once a 'tutelary spirit attendant on a person', has come to be understood as an 'exceptional natural ability' that is innate. Today, the apparent decline of one who was once perceived as a genius means more than being out of touch with one's tutelary spirit; it means one is somehow broken inside.

Gilbert shared a couple of stories about musicians and writers who heard a song or story coming toward them and knew that if they weren't to grasp

it immediately it would move on until landing in someone who was *at the ready*. They understood that creativity is a reckoning in real time.

Giving rise to the genius and beauty of this world is not solely in the capacity of us as individuals. While it flows through us at times, it mostly eddies and swirls in the spaces between us, lapping up and into those who are most porous at the time.

HER HUMBER

She wanders down along the salmon highway, the one that runs in the valley close to their home.

This is the way of the Deer and has been forever. Her kind have witnessed all that has changed in the valley over time—the coming and going of Teiaiaagon, the trading of furs, the mill, the bridges, the paved walkways, the dogs, the condos. It has become tricky to be there but where else are they to go? And this allows them to remember where and who they come from. Besides, the river couldn't be a river without them.

She meets the highway that spans over the delta of the river and attempts to make her way across. This is not the kind of crossing she is prepared for.

It is early morning and a father and son are departing for a day of travel on the highway. City crews have gathered to clear a deer from the road and the son pulls over. It is unusual for him to have a pick-up truck and he suddenly feels particularly fortunate.

"Do you want her?" the city workers ask.

"Yes, I do," replies the son and he squats down to whisper in her ear a few words of blessing, of acknowledgement, of introduction perhaps.

"Oh, she's dead," the city worker assures him.

The son stands up and prepares to load her into the pick-up. Luckily, he's brought a tarp.

At home the phone rings. It is too early and the young woman is under the weather. Once she gets the kids out the door she is looking forward to lying on the couch and watching a movie. She never does this on a weekday but with her husband away on business and the blues having come to visit she looks forward to sinking into a silent and gentle time to sorrow. He's left before dawn in a rented pick-up and taken his father along for the ride. Some time together on the road will make space for old stories to be told and new ones to show up. And his mother could use the break. The young woman picks up the phone.

"We've been blessed already" he tells her.

"Oh?" She replies, "What happened?"

She's saddened to hear the news. We are so hard on the world.

"And you are going south with her in the pick-up?" she asks.

"No, no. I turned right around and brought her home," he explains. "She's in the garage. I've put out some calls to see who can come and take care of her."

Anger flashes through her but can't get much of a purchase.

The morning is just starting to brighten. It's early December and the days are shortening but the light still comes. The children are coaxed from their warm beds. Lunches are packed and knapsacks prepared for the day at school. The routines awaken her sense of normalcy and she begins to wonder if the early morning call had been the epilogue of a dreamy night. As she opens the porch door to send the children off she sees a trickle of blood in the driveway. The day has truly awakened.

"Ron's cousin isn't answering right now," he reports. She knows that the father is not the one dialling the calls on the cell phone as the son is barrelling down the highway.

"I'll take care of it," she insists. "I think you better pay attention to the roads. I'll see if the butchers on Bloor can be of any help."

She dresses and makes her way to the end of the driveway, steeling herself for the unknown. She lifts the garage door and is immediately in view of the deer's head on the floor, her eyes wide open, freshly staring. She is startled by her beauty. She pulls on the tarp and drags her out into the light. She is a gorgeous doe with a thick coat of subtly speckled browns giving way to the white of her belly and tail. She is so perfect and beautiful.

She's never had to call the butcher before and even though she's frequented their shops many times, she's embarrassed to admit she knows no-one by name. The shameful anonymity of the big city registers. She

stokes her courage with the thought that at least a good laugh might come to be had behind the counter in an otherwise run-of-the-mill day slicing meat. The second call she makes garners a human voice.

“Your husband did what?” the butcher chuckles. “Nice guy! Yeah, I’m a bow hunter so I can give you a hand. I’ll have 10 minutes at lunch break. See you then.”

The morning passes with calls of consultation and the sharpening of knives. She’s daunted by the task she faces, but she has witnessed a little of this work before and the urgency of caring for the deer is summoning some strength. Honouring her death by handling her well has become the bigger concern.

The phone rings at 12:10. “I’m in the driveway” the butcher states.

She gathers the knives and heads out. His job is already almost done. He’s slit the belly and removed most of her innards. Together, they transfer them to a bag.

“Might you be able to remove her head before you go?” she gently pleads. “I think that would really help me.”

“No problem,” he replies. And with a few skilled cuts the task is done. Exchanges of gratitude are hastened by the butcher’s brisk departure and she reels back to face the work that remains in her hands. And she begins.

The world falls away as she comes to know the deer. She does her best to remove the skin, aware of

how easily the tip of the knife can scar its surface. The deer's body has been badly broken from the hit and only some parts can be kept for eating. As she grapples with discerning how to divide up the carcass she is joined by her husband's mother who sits closely by, watching every move of her hands as she works. This Old Woman has seen many slaughterings in her days and has prepared thousands of meals for her family and community. She's no stranger to the visceral reality of putting food on the table. Disguising her expertise with words of encouragement and praise she cheers her daughter-in-law on. Admired and supported the knife handler is grateful to be seen by her. An hour in the driveway has taken them a hundred years back and forward again in a kinship of making food from death. The young woman's spirit is lifted and grateful. The blessing her husband so quickly proclaimed has become discernable.

The days ahead bring heavy labours. A fleshing beam is made. The skin is scraped and soaked and scraped again. A bath of ash is mixed to encourage the hair to let go. The grey skin it makes brings tears. The deer's head is held in harvesting her brains—nature's agent of softening miracles. The hide is twisted and soaked, twisted and soaked, twisted and soaked and twisted. The son, the young woman and their two children gather around a slow fire to stretch her while she gently dries. Their eyes sting with the smoke.

The hide comes to be known as Humber and she and her story join them in their dining room. They

could make something else of her but they can't bring themselves to cut her.

Three years pass and the Old Woman labours her way to her own death. Her son follows the edges of Humber's expanse with a blade that cuts a spiralling length of cord. The borders of the deer's skin that once met each other along her belly, that once contained a life that trailed the forests along the salmon highway are employed to bind his mother's shrouded body.

Would that they have both been well received on the other side of the river.

HOW LABURU CAME TO US

By Javier Espinal, March 15, 2019.

Dear Panya, my love,

Thanks for asking me to write this story.

This story of the canoe and how she came into our lives is best told with more people remembering, so this attempt, made from a hotel room in New Albany, Mississippi after a full day of driving a fork lift, will be made while YouTube is playing a song that I sang to my Aita in his dying days. It is the song *Xalbadorren heriotzean* (Erramun Martikorena) that we sang at his send-off from his house on

Jane, the song that was sung or cried by many wonderful friends and family at the gathering at the Club Hispano.

Amaya Carmen and sometimes Mika and sometimes Monica, but mainly Carm and I would take off from the cottage for the Muskoka roads, just to go for a drive. Our final destination was usually the dump, just past Port Carling. There, they have a garage style building open on both ends where Muskoka cottagers leave no-longer-loved treasures. We've brought home everything from game tables, vices, espresso cups, mugs and, of course, books. Sometimes we would just organize the book shelves while we looked at the titles and the stories. Every abandoned object had their story. Who knew? How had they served? Some of the books had a name and wishes on the inside of the flap, but never enough.

Some of the other places we visited were the gas station and convenience store, the ice cream parlour, the Yellow House of antiques and then there was the Red Barn for treasures and memories. On this one occasion, we discovered a birch bark canoe hanging from both ends in the rafters. She was beautiful and gracefully curved at both ends. No, I don't speak marine language yet, but she did speak to me. She had

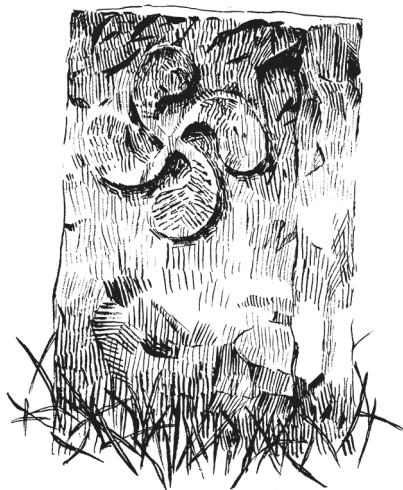
never seen water and she needed to feel that to be fully alive. She was a beauty, maybe a little over manicured with a coat of some stain from the picker, Scott, who found her and put her up for resale in his summer antique shop. From where I stood, looking at the small white price tag and even smaller numbers, it seemed reasonable and that we must share this discovery immediately.

When we returned to the Red Barn with Mika and Panya, Panya mentioned gently, “are you sure you saw the price?” When I looked closer, I saw that we were not in the price range to bring her home to the water.

Months passed but we kept remembering her and wondering if we could come closer to something reasonable or if she was even still available. Scott told us that she was still available and that he would consider a better price. He was going to be collecting all his antiques from the Muskoka Red Barn Shop and taking them to the Ontario Royal Winter Fair where there would be lots of traffic and admirers of these memories and treasures.

It was a Halloween night, right around trick-or-treating time, that Scott showed up with his old Ford Econoline van and covered trailer, packed

to the brim with treasures and antiques—the birch bark beauty resting on top. We gently brought her out onto a neighbour’s lawn and then carried her right into the foyer of our house where we could welcome her and really see her in good light. We spent some time some time admiring her and learning that she was built in and around 1950 near Golden Lake, Ontario. To this day, we still want to find more of her story and learn who built her. David from The Temagami Canoe Company gave us some strong leads that we need to follow through on to add more to this story.



An old stone marker, carved with the Laburu.

Scott, Panya and I wondered where in our home she would hang over the winter. It was concluded that the dining room might work, if we were able to get her in there. So we tried. We gently walked her, twisting and turning and dancing her into the kitchen and then moved the fridge so that we could sweep her into the dining room and onto the dining room table. She just fit, with a couple of centimeters at each end, or maybe even less. She was hung, ribs exposed down, onto two beaver sticks that were looped into old ropes salvaged from the demolished Lithuanian Auditorium stage that used to be on College, just east of Dufferin. And It wasn't long before Panya crafted an epically beautiful light fixture, made from old pieces of gum wood that had decorated our 1920's Bloor West Village dining room. The light lit up the inside of the canoe and shone down on our table.

Most recently, I received an early morning text message from Panya while working here in Mississippi. Panya is in the heat of completing this publication. She said, "Good morning my love. An idea I propose: we could name our dear canoe LAUBURU". I responded shortly thereafter, remembering that I thought I proposed that years earlier, but it sounded so sweet hearing it from her. It wasn't my idea

anymore. It was planted now and being watered with tears and more stories to make her grow. I responded, “Wow. My eyes are watering. *Egunon* my love”.

I always thought, or grew up thinking, that it was spelled Laburu. To me, it represented a symbol that united the Basque people. I would see it on cemetery walls and was always attracted to it. Aita always told me that it stood for 'four heads' and every time I asked to learn more, I always got the same answer. Ten years ago, I excitedly found a page with a picture of the Laburu in porcupine quillwork by the Mi'kmaq. It was in an Oxford text book called *Canada's First Nations*. Sitting with my Aita in the waiting room of his dentist's office I found another image, this time of the Laburu on the nose of a voyageur canoe.

Laburu has looked down on many, many feasts and exquisite dishes and gatherings. She's heard stories and songs and cries. She's heard memories and praises. The dining table she shines on is where Panya wrote some of the stories for this publication and where many other works have been made by our family. Laburu has heard kings recite poetry, and fools get up and leave, and people give gracious, epic toasts. Great gifts have been received and

given with Laburu as witness. Laburu heard my mom, in her dying days, read aloud a love letter that she wrote to my Aita before they had ever seen each other.

Laburu finally felt the Humber River beneath her. Not far from our home, on a sunny summer day, she carried Panya and I up and down the river where deer travel and the salmon still return. Laburu has also traveled to Temagami on the roof of our car wrapped in a specially made sleeve to protect her from the wind. In Temagami Laburu, Panya and I ended up on the front cover of a local paper, in a colour picture of us paddling to the Temagami Canoe Festival.

It has been another long day in Mississippi and that song is playing again. I'm tired from work and am looking forward to being home with Mika, Carm and Panya, looking forward to Laburu seeing us together again and hearing us admire and thank her.

Gabon

Love,
Javier

YOUNG LOVE HANGS IN THE RAFTERS

There is a fervent eagerness that shows up when planting corn. To have a dried cob in one's hands, to release the ordered rows of seeds with a pressured twist, to hear the cascading kernels pinging against the side of the glass bowl, to run one's fingers through the piles of future possibility—this awakens an old feeling of abundance.

The young couple tenderly approach their older farmer friends. With a long and generous view, a field for planting is offered up. Friends, both older and younger, are invited to join in this courtship of corn and those who are 'in' gather. With comradeship, holes are dug, row upon row. Shall we put in 4 seeds in each? Maybe a few more, just in case. The very young bring water to those planting.

Spring rains and warmth ask the seeds to end their days as such and allow new life to jump up. The tender shoots delight the cut worms. The young woman hastens to protect what can be saved, making plastic party cup shields for each surviving one. The hot, dry days come and together the young couple water the field. What have we taken on? Much to tend to, much to feed. And now the weeds.

The labour of cultivation goes mostly unseen. The older sowers show up on occasion to lighten the load, as they can, but mostly to admire the determination of the young ones, to witness their lament, their love, their

labour. What a gorgeous field of corn. What bounty!

Harvest day arrives and everyone convenes to marvel at the generosity of the seeds, the soil, the rains, the sun. Bags are filled with cobs and distributed. The bulk of the bounty needs a home, a sheltered place to hang and dry. The older couple offer up their dining room. Lines are strung and loaded up with the hearty medicine of these ancient guests.

On special days, their table is laden with nourishment—the gift of the corn. To sit beneath the beauty of young love, to be reminded of how that is, to make a home for its bounty—this is a feast every day.

KING'S LAST CHAPTER

In 2003 Thomas King regaled audiences with his series of five CBC Massey Lectures titled *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. As is the norm, the lectures were later published in a book for readers to enjoy. Here, King adds a sixth text titled *Afterwords: Private Stories*.

King makes a distinction that he acknowledges is arguable. He claims that oral stories are public stories and written stories are private stories. And he proceeds to write a story that he was unwilling to share orally.

In the first five stories King brilliantly elucidates the tangled and disturbing misconceptions that have contributed to the plight of Native peoples in the North American context. He engages us with wit

and wisdom infused with the relatable details of contemporary culture.

The sixth chapter acts as a personal confession; it is the story he doesn't want to tell, the one that no-one wants to hear, the one he can't tell without weeping. He weeps because the story reveals the ethics in a world that he recognizes he helped create.

“A world in which I allow my intelligence and goodwill to be constantly subverted by my pursuit of comfort and pleasure. And because knowing all of this, it is doubtful that given a second chance to make amends for my despicable behavior, I would do anything different, for I find it easier to tell myself the story of my failure as a friend, as a human being, than to live the story of making the sustained effort to help.”

This story is such a human story, so full of grief and helplessness. And it is so triumphantly well written. Thank you for letting us in to your private story, Thomas King.

SKIN AND BONES

When we sold the Muskoka cottage it was very difficult to decide what to keep of the so-called 'chattels'. Leaving her in an inhabitable condition somehow convinced us that the new owners would be more likely

to cherish her as much as we had. But every single item in the place, from the Band-Aids to the bedposts, was so deeply infused with embodied memory that the thought of leaving anything behind was devastating. But we had no choice. We couldn't take it all and we knew it. And stripping her bare, leaving her naked, felt equally disrespectful. Tears still come as I write this. People are meant to die. Places are not.

Much of the blue and white china that my great grandparents purchased in the early days was made in Stoke-on-Trent, England, by a pottery called Spode. This was the company that invented 'bone china' and, although ours was not, the cups and saucers, plates and platters came to feel like exactly that—bones.

At the time, my husband was deep into scraping deer hides in preparation for brain tanning. Having put the word out to hunters, he was regularly picking up heads and hides; knowing that someone was willing to do the work, the hunters clearly preferred to honour their kill as best they could.

One day, I set to work to introduce the cup and saucer to the raw hide. What kinds of conversations would they have? How would these old bones receive this skin? How would this skin behave in the presence of these bones?

If we are around at the right time, in the right place, and can be quiet enough to hear, their haunting and beautiful stories may show up again.

ENOUGH

“Unable to appeal to the authority of art, you begin again, with whatever skills you have gathered along the way and whatever help you can find. You do what it takes to make work that has a chance of coming alive in the spaces where we meet, to build those spaces in such a way that it is safe to bring more of ourselves. This does not need to be grand; you are not arranging a wedding. A group of strangers sits around a table and share a meal. A visitor tells a story around a fire. You half-remember a line you heard as a child, something about it being enough when two or three are gathered together.”

—*Dougald Hine, Childish Things, Dark Mountain, Issue 12, 2017.*

THE HARBOURMASTER

HANNA OF GJÖRGUR

*June 6, 2018. Norðurfjorður, Árneshreppur County,
Iceland*

The first morning I awoke in Norðurfjorður the light was as bright as when I had gone to sleep. I raised the blind of the bedroom window and my heart sank to discover the port was almost empty; I had missed all the action of the fishermen heading out for the day. They leave at 4 am, I later learned, some of them sleeping on their boats to enable a timely departure. It was early June and the fishing season was in full swing.

I found Elín in the Fish House, preparing the vats of ice in anticipation of the fishermen's return. The job she had undertaken as Harbour Master had required she get her forklift license and I could see she had become impressively adept at managing the stacks of large plastic bins waiting to receive the catch. The

day was sunny and enjoyably calm. Everyone was going about their work, soaking up the solace of busy, light-filled, summer life in the remote north.

As I circled the tiny harbour I noticed Hilmar readying his boat, Hanna. Hilmar and I had made our introductions the day before when some troubles with Hanna's battery had kept him from fishing for the day. I had approached and he had welcomed a chat. His English was surprisingly good and he responded delightedly to the mention of Canada. "Yes, yes," he said. "I've been to Canada! I visited my family in Gimli many years ago." With this he proudly held up a tiny plastic bottle that had once held Canadian Maple Syrup. "It's full of Irish Whisky now," he chuckled. Unscrewing the cap, he passed it to me. "Have a sip," he urged. And I did.

I squatted dockside along Hanna watching while Hilmar set about the task of reconnecting the wiring. "I'm getting too old for this," he proclaimed. "My knee is bad and I need to get it fixed. This boat is very old too. So much of her has been rebuilt over the years there might only be one original board left. My father bought her and restored her and here I am, 78 and still fishing." I offered to bring Hilmar a coffee and he smiled. "Yes, yes. That would be very nice."

Kaffe Norðurfjorður is run by Lóvís and Sara, two women from Reykjavik who serve the community in the summer months when traffic in the village makes the operation viable. As Lóvís prepared my order, I explained that the coffee was for Hilmar and

she lit up. "He's the oldest fisherman in Iceland and that is the smallest fishing vessel going," she stated. "That's really true." I delivered the coffee to Hilmar and wished him well in his labours, leaving him to focus on the task at hand.

So, circling around the port the next morning, I gestured a hello to Hilmar, realizing that he was leaving the port later than the other fisherman, but nonetheless getting on his way. From the pier Elín gestured as well, both to him and to me, and called out, "Maybe you should go fishing with Hilmar!" Hilmar circled Hanna around. "I am happy to have you come along," he agreed, "but I don't have insurance for you. I have it for me and my boat, but not for you. We would be taking a risk." Hilmar hesitated. But there was no question for me. If he was willing to take me I was excited to go. "Well, the day seems pretty calm and, of course, I would love to come if you are sure you are okay with it," I gently replied. "I certainly don't want to be in your way." Hilmar waved me aboard and off we went.

The seas were calm that day and remained so. Once we left the sunny port the mist became heavier, masking any view of the shoreline. We motored out for an hour or so, myself toward the bow and Hilmar in the tiny cabin at the stern. The radio may have been playing. I don't remember. I was immersed in another world.

When Hilmar cut the motor, I took his spot at the back and he occupied the center of the boat.

Any significant shifting required communication as there was room for only one to pass alongside the large central vat waiting to store the day's catch. Lines were released from two automated reel boxes, each tied with a series of hooks baited with old fish brought out from port. The reel boxes performed the once-manual releasing and retracting of the lines and Hilmar listened for the change in sound that experience told him indicated a bite. In the meantime we exchanged comments and observations, asking each other questions and slowly unfolding our stories.

Hilmar had worked in the corporate world, I learned. While fishing was an ancestral given, he had become a banker and established a home and family in Reykjavík. I was beginning to see why he spoke English as well as he did. The business world had been favourable to Hilmar in the early days but Iceland's economy had hit some rough patches and things had turned on him. Times had been really tough.

With little understanding of Iceland's economic history and only anecdotal threads from my recent days to go on, I was hard pressed to genuinely understand the circumstances Hilmar described. Language began to fail us. I knew I didn't have the right questions to ask and I suspected he knew I didn't really get it. Nonetheless, he kept talking and I listened intently. I could see the story in his gestures and expressions. Oddly, it appeared that Hilmar was confiding in me. He was telling me something that came along with a request for confidentiality. The details of what I had

been told escaped me so, without hesitation, I could assure him his secrets were safe with me.

With Hanna's hold as full of fish as it needed to be, we headed back through the fog. We knew the bigger boats would have caught more than their quota, if this day was like those of recent memory. The younger fishermen would give their excess to the Old Man. Hanna could never hold the size of catch that is permitted today.

If it were up to Hanna and the Old Man, the sea and our secrets would be safe forever.

ÖRLAGATRÚ

Written by Bergsveinn Birgisson following Elín Agla's speech, given at the "Landnámsbær fundinn á Seltrönd" (Settlement found on Seltrands) Archaeological Conference, Hveravík á Ströndöm, Iceland, August 18, 2018.

"My feeling is that when Elín Agla spoke, a kind of deep calm came over the audience at the conference. An existential calm, a calm that arises when you witness a grande artwork or something beautiful. For everyone else spoke in analytical ways and with a scientific vocabulary about a culture that was around over a thousand years ago, a culture that is gone, a culture that is difficult for us to interpret because she is

unknown to us. But Elín Agla took that same thinking into our times. She pointed out in a friendly way that there is a culture that is dying right in front of our noses, and how we do little or nothing to rescue some of the old or prevent these processes. She spoke about remembering and not forgetting, and how her work is dedicated to those two things, to create a platform or path for her people to remember and to not forget.

The big task in it is in accordance with the only grande thing our culture has ever created and gifted to world culture. I am speaking about the ancient bards and storytellers who wrote for example the Icelandic sagas, for the greatness in their work was that they refused to forget the ways of their ancestors despite living in a completely new world view and thinking. They did not write binary romances about the evil pagans and the good Christians, like the rest of Europe was doing at that time until Don Quixote. They wanted to preserve another way of thinking (French: episteme) which they knew was being forgotten.

I will let it suffice to name the ancient ethics that "sinn eld skuli hver ábyrgjast" / each person is responsible to look after their fire and the old Vyrð belief (Örlogatrú).

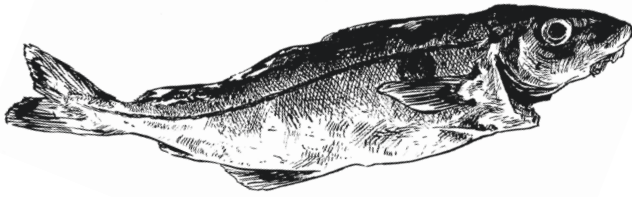
They did not condemn the old, they saw the richness in it despite the paradigm shift in thinking. There was no subservience in their work, no great fashion in the southern lands that they wanted to imitate, they learnt the technology in the south but made the stories in the spirit of their own ancient culture. Which means that they understood that the world is where one self is and that the work of a great artist and shaman in each culture is to try to hinder the RIFT that happens when grande changes take place in culture and in thinking: to remember on behalf of your people. Such people often become heroes in later times, but all the subservient people are quickly forgotten.

Only dead fish follow the stream according to a Japanese saying. Elín Agla swims upstream strongly as salmon.”

THE FISHERMEN AT DRANGSNES

The fishermen at Drangsnæs leave port in the evening. It has been dark since four o'clock but the waters are calm enough to go. They travel out to sea dropping sixteen miles of line baited along its length with pieces of fish. The gulls follow feeding on stray bait.

When the line has been laid the fishermen sleep for two hours in the cabin. They awaken to the persistent



The gift of Haddock from Baldur at Drangnes port.

darkness and begin retracing their path. They gather in the line sorting the catch of cod, haddock and catfish. They will return to port by early evening and be met by the harbour worker to unload their cargo.

I see the vessel approaching and hear the squawking of circling birds. Making my way to the docks to watch, I admire the impressive size of the largest cod. Welcoming me with a wide smile, one of the fishermen lifts him by the tail and jaw to test his weight. "About 25 kilos," he says and I wonder how long this one has made home in the waters.

The fisherman offers to send me home with fish for us to cook. With an exchange of names and many thanks, one cod and one haddock, in a bag found aboard the boat, accompany me home.

This is a blessing upon the catch, I'm told. A blessing on the sea. A blessing on their next journey out, which will begin again in an hour or two, should the waters remain co-operative. There is just enough time for the fishermen to tuck in their young ones at home before heading out to lay the lines again.

Only rough seas bring rest.

The fish are slippery and the knife not as sharp as might be best. Inexperience has me hesitating and tentatively working my way toward a home-cooked feast. Butter and salt, lemon pepper and love. We are among the well fed.

CLAIMED

She is seen by Seal through the kitchen window and can now properly proclaim that she is welcomed home.

Many others have noticed her approach. The seawaters that have left their salt kin and travelled back to the mountaintop trickle, again, down the hummocked hillside into her waiting cup at that certain spot by the side of the road.

The mothers and their lambs scamper ahead but refuse to leave the road, ensuring her arrival is none too soon nor none too hasty.

Those who have made their homes in the rock-gates nod to her remembering them. And the ones who met their fiery deaths

know she will visit when she has more time—
this is never a quick thing, nor should it be.

The beaches remember her having come,
accompanied by raven and white tulip offerings.
Seal-mates have found each other here.

The blue house at Stóra-Ávik
reminisces over her stay.
The guest book lies open to that page,
to those days when many others visited as well.
The party got a little wild for his old bones.
And he loved it and her.
Go back, he whispers now,
you are needed here again.

The fearless hound wants to come with her.
He's too reckless for his own good and for hers.
A feral ferocity that warns her of the edge.
There is one, she knows.

She threads through the fallen boulders,
stringing a necklace of pearls along the shoreline.
Her tear-petals are scattered up and down
this gravel aisle.

She's been given away to this place.
And they have claimed her.

IN OUR HOLD

You and I, Dearest Elín, have committed ourselves to making this boat. A confluence of winds and waves have conspired to bring us to each other's shores and into each other's homes. Several old allies have called to us, fed us well, and cultivated in us curiosity and wondering. It has been an honour to be in your company and I am very grateful that you have been willing to travel with me over these past months as a comrade in scholarship and life.

As we set out to do the work of writing this volume (however slim she may be!), I catch a glimmer of the consequence of attempting such a thing. There is the very real possibility that this will fail, that our sails will not catch the wind, that pumping water out of the bilge will take over our days, or that we will simply run amuck.

Thank you for taking the risk. Thank you for agreeing to climb aboard with me.

We have something in our hold that we cherish and as we ferry her from your shores to mine and back again, her wellbeing is our priority. She may choose not to come up for air. She may never be seen on the deck. Should it be so, it should be so, for that which we ferry is in our keeping but does not belong to us. She is part of that Örlög you speak of, that natural order of things, and we labour to defend her wildness. If she is willing to appear, however, may she enjoy the view. It would be lovely to stand beside her with

you and see what she sees together.

The Whaleroad is long and wide and its waters run deep. Our small and precarious vessel is lashed together by an illogical and unlikely willingness that garners its strength from the unknown. The cargo we carry can be heavy and cumbersome; we are unsure of what our journey requires. Many people have gifted and burdened us with goods to carry. There are those who stand behind us, the ones who made us, the ones who crafted our vessels and soaked ever plank with story, song and time. There are those who were willing to sew the sails and forge the hinges, hooks and nails that pin our joints. There are those who were willing to pickle the foods, and cure the meats, and ferment the cider. There are those who have given us maps with every intention to help us navigate the seas and find our way to back to solid ground. Perhaps they would prefer we never leave port.

There is nothing watertight about this craft. Her crew is a vagabond troop of delicious and disconcerting characters, boisterous and boring, charming and offensive, adventuresome and homesick. Porous enough to be soaked in life.

Tis a leaky boat we ply.

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PANYA CLARK ESPINAL

Panya Clark Espinal was born 9 years before Elín Agla, in Toronto. She is a maker, a nascent curator, and a comrade to living ways that honour the relations between Story and human making.

This volume is a collective rendering of some of the stories we live in and with. It aims to construct a hull, the belly of a floating form, that can navigate safe passage between our harbours at a time of unmeasurable drift. We are bound by her keel, that which give us strength and keeps us upright in heavy winds. She is not watertight by any means, but her porosity allows her planks to be well soaked with grief and longing. May she be a generous host to life.

panya.ca

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE SHIPYARDS

UNPACKING OUR STORIES	3
DEAD RECKONING	4
ORIGINS	5
JUST BENEATH THE WEB	5
WARP-WEIGHTED	7
WINTER SOLSTICE IN THE NORTH	10

MOORED

A GEOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNTING	12
THE STORIES WE LIVE BY AND IN	15
93 GLENVIEW AVE.	15
“SO—WHAT DO I BELIEVE”	16
CLAY	19
CHURCH DOCK ROAD	20
FOR NOW, I KNOW THIS PLACE	23
THE MAKALIKA	24
ISLAND 132	27
A SLOW RECKONING	28

LEAVING PORT

SHIFTING BASELINES	31
THE STORIES WE WANT TO TELL	32
MORMOR	33
MEASURING TIME	33
THE PLAQUE	34

FOG AND DRIFT

UNSPEAKABLE	36
I AM SO AFRAID OF WORDS	37
DEAD QUIET	38
CROSSING IN 1907	40
CATCH AND KILL	42
THE STORYTELLER.....	43
THE LAST RUN.....	49

A LEAKY BOAT

RECKONING IN REAL TIME	52
HER HUMBER	53
HOW LABURU CAME TO US	58
YOUNG LOVE HANGS IN THE RAFTERS	65
KING'S LAST CHAPTER	66
SKIN AND BONES	67
ENOUGH	69

THE HARBOURMASTER

HANNA OF GJÖRGUR	70
ÖRLAGATRÚ	74
THE FISHERMEN AT DRANGSNES	76
CLAIMED	78
IN OUR HOLD	80

ON WHALEROADS
AND BOATMAKING

PANYA CLARK ESPINAL

