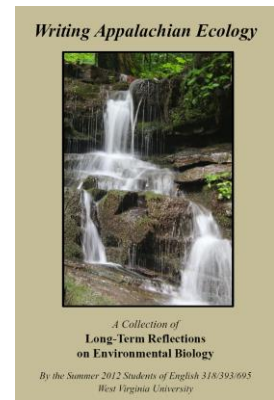


Excerpts from Writing Appalachian Ecology Summer 2012 Edition:



Had We But Forest Enough and Time

Sitting next to a fern halfway up a mountain in West Virginia, I felt the thinness of our existence. I glimpsed the invisible, near-infinite interconnected webs that hold us up, the buffer zones between humanity and destruction. Humans may be the dominant species at the moment, but we are only a tiny part of the picture. We remain on the surface of the planet, skittering about and building things. An entire world goes on below us, slightly above, in our midst, so much vaster than we'll ever be. At the most basic level, it is this world—plants, animals, water, microorganisms, linked and living, constantly changing—that support life. We are amateurs, we bipedal mammals with opposable thumbs.

--Jessi Kalvitis



Anthroposcenes

To wander in a forest has deeply religious connections. Siddhartha Gautama, Jesus, Mohammad, Joseph Smith all took vows of solitude and fasting away from their peoples and entered a forest, alone. They found a silence. Not the silence of a lack of sound, but a lack of human noise. They felt a connection—a connection that led them to their conclusions, large or small, of their relationships to the earth and its living things; they found connections that had been crafted from the hands of their fathers and their makers, that they had lost sight of in their cities. They found room to meditate and room to breathe, room to focus their eyes and see. They found a peace away from petty trifles, they found meaning.

--Amanda Clark



A Mystery We May Never Solve

I looked up at the ceiling of trees, the sun illuminating their bright green colors. I looked around and saw all the leaves and branches that had fallen from their source of life. ... I sat looking at all the limbs that were broken and waiting to decay. I looked up at the trees that had been broken from the storm that had occurred a few weeks before. One tree in particular got my attention. It was still standing, but was broken half way down. The broken pieces looked like jagged glass, but the tree still survived. It still stood tall and it intended to keep growing, even though it had been broken into half of what it once was.

--Brittany Elliott



The Difference Between a Maple and a Birch

Harvesting timber is needed. I wish that it wasn't, but we've just come too far as a civilization to not require it. There is no way around that. ... There is a right way to harvest trees, and there is a wrong way. We know this, yet still, the right way, being Single-Tree Selection, gets used the least. In the end it's a question of short-term monetary gain, or long-term life of a civilization. Without forests, without trees, we die. We learn that at a very early age. It's simple, it's true, and you don't need to be able to tell the difference between a maple and a birch to understand the severity of that seemingly forgotten fact.

--Corey Hodges



Aqueous Transcendentalism

I want to get back to my roots, the forests and streams where life starts. All living things are part of a cycle and as far as I can tell, my cycle starts in the familiar Appalachian forests I call home. The familiar streams with cool, flowing water are engulfed in forests so diverse I could spend years trying to name each organism that calls this place home. From the high-flying birds to the low-lying vegetation, each organism is unique and essential to the overall cycle of nutrients in this ecosystem. I am no different than these forest inhabitants; I contribute a part to the nutrient cycle.

--Hannah Spencer



The Voice of the Tree-song

I watched as a single leaf dwindled from her home in the city of poplar leaves, as she traveled down to the soil to be a part of the nutrient cycle. I knew that her death was not meaningless—she would provide food for worms, and perhaps might have aspired to be the fuel for a forest fire. ... I could only hope that my death would hold such a dignified purpose. ... Yet there was one thing this leaf and I had in common: We have left our familiar worlds in order to take part in something beyond our understanding.

--Suzanne Ripley



Genetic Memory

I cannot do justice to the way rain leaves fog to linger through the hills of Appalachia in its wake. I watch the fog drape through the dangling needles and feel it has something to say to us, something to tell us, but I don't know precisely what. It's made more of feeling than words—which is why it takes the form of fog rather than letters. It envelops time, holds for a moment all that's passed through that patch of forest, even as it begins to pass through the place, too.

--Rebecca Doverspike



Baptized by Earth

Suddenly it dawns on me, everything we eat comes from soil, and everything grows because of soil. The massive Northern red oaks, yellow poplars, red maples, and black locusts above us only grew so tall because of soil! I begin to think about how soil is the foundation of everything. My family is a lot like soil; they are my foundation, and everything I am is because of them. I have a lot more in common with nature than I thought!

--Katy Hurley



A Thank You to the Forest

As humans, we often don't realize how much we rely on the forest; for shelter, for warmth, for tools, for food, for enjoyment. We so eagerly cut them down to meet our demands, we want and need so much. And yet, we don't take even a second to think of the forest, to thank it for what it has given us, to do something for it in return. Instead we poison it, burning fuel and dumping trash that poisons the earth, poisons the air, and poisons the rain that quenches the forest's thirst. We chop down the trees so that we may build more houses, bigger houses, and so we can furnish them to our exact tastes.

--Melisaa Winiecki

Writing Appalachian Ecology

*A Collection of
Long-Term Reflections
on Environmental Biology*



Summer 2012 Students

Course Instructors



Katie Fallon's nonfiction has appeared in a variety of magazines and journals. Katie teaches creative writing at WVU.



Dr. Bill Peterjohn teaches biology at WVU and has conducted research for over 19 years at the Fernow Experimental Forest.

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