

The Gettysburg Review 23:1 spring 2010

ESSAYS

LAURA-ROSE RUSSELL *Scented*, 5

JACK BUSHNELL *The Swallows of Selborne*, 41

TOM ELLIOTT *A Town Somewhere*, 53

SUE EISENFELD *One Windy Day*, 68

LISA DORRILL *Fire and Ice: The Sublime Landscapes of Eric Aho*, 78

MIKE FREEMAN *The Feel*, 111

JEFFREY MEYERS *Theme and Variations: Lady Chatterley's Lover and
L. P. Hartley's The Go-Between*, 120

KRISTINA MARIE DARLING "This desire for linkage": *Form, Narrative, and
History in Four Recent Poetry Collections by Women*, 147

FICTION

IAN RANDALL WILSON *Keep to the Pocket Concept*, 19

JOHN FRIED *Chicago*, 89

KURT RHEINHEIMER *Philadelphia*, 99

BRADFORD KAMMIN *Cereal Days*, 136

POETRY

JOHN W. EVANS *Corn Snake and Almanac*, 14

CAROLINE FINKELSTEIN *Here*, 40

MAURYA SIMON *Birth and A Slow Death*, 51

NATHANIEL PERRY *Drainage, The Farm to Choose, Poultry, and Remaking a
Neglected Orchard*, 64

MARTHA ZWEIG *Contretemps and Pinch Me*, 76

TRACI BRIMHALL *Dueling Sonnets on the Railroad Tracks*, 98

One Windy Day

I had spent many nights listening to the wind, clutching my pillow and assessing the severity of each storm. From the bed, I saw silhouettes of the trees in the backyard and beyond, branches like black Medusas in the dark. I heard the thud of acorns and twigs and pieces of dead limbs hitting the roof, rain pouring down the gutter at the northeast corner of the house. Not the nine years living in this Cape Cod that backed up to woods, nor the assurance of a two-thousand-dollar pruning job of the large oak hovering over our bedroom could ease the anxiety of knowing a mature canopy grasped for purchase above me. I would fall asleep eventually, though I sometimes slept fitfully, or—in the case of Hurricane Isabel, which passed through our area in 2003—I slept downstairs; I could not otherwise erase the image of the tree uprooting, crashing down through our stick-frame house, and crushing us in bed.

I had seen mature oaks uprooted in our neighborhood before, after storms when we had walked the bike path and neighborhood along Four Mile Run, observing the washed-away bridges, the picnic tables in the creek, the debris in yards and streets. I believed that our tree would fall eventually during a storm. Maybe we would not be home at the moment; maybe it would not fall onto the bed.

I had wondered many times exactly how tall the tree was, how many feet of it would reach the roof—the tree stood at least twenty feet away from the deck, and the deck extended about twenty feet from the house. I had wondered how much it weighed, and whether the materials of the house would keep the full weight of the tree from descending upon us. How quickly would we die from being smashed by an oak tree several feet in diameter? I pondered these things, encouraged by the howling, the pat of persistent rain.

When I drove home from work on June 4, 2008, I was surprised to see my husband, Neil, standing in the street, two blocks from our house. It had been a pretty uneventful afternoon. I had nearly forgotten about the brief storm that had captivated our office (full of weather buffs and environmentalists, looking out nearly floor-to-ceiling windows in a midrise building). This kind of thing had happened many times before: the sky turned greenish, people discussed tor-

nadoes, we watched wind rattle street signs and hanging traffic lights, the rain fell sideways, and when it was done, the sky cleared, and we went back to work. That day, I stopped at a boutique after work to go shopping. I spent a hundred dollars buying clothes I did or didn't need; I was in a rare shopping mood. Nothing pressing waited for me that evening, and Neil usually didn't get home from work until 6:30 or 7:00.

I pulled over to give Neil a lift, puzzled by his loitering on a street corner of our suburban neighborhood—the oldest neighborhood in Arlington, Virginia, with one house dating to 1749. He had the manner of someone without a care in the world, and in a jovial, bemused sort of way, as he closed the car door, he said, “The tree has fallen.”

The day before, on June 3, at 3:15 PM, Ian Livingston logged this report on the Capital Weather Gang Web site, linked from the *Washington Post*: “Afternoon storms that form and pass through tomorrow afternoon and evening may be strong to severe, with the main threat being damaging wind. There will also be a slight risk of tornadic activity.” I don't generally check weather reports unless something is actually happening, so I remained unaware that a storm was coming.

On June 4, at 2:25 AM, the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma, issued Tornado Watch 443 for “a large part of Virginia,” indicating that conditions were favorable for tornadoes and severe thunderstorms. At 5:00 AM, Dan Stillman of Capital Weather Gang wrote, “As highs climb into the mid to upper 80s, with noticeably high humidity, the threat for showers and thunderstorms increases again for the late afternoon through early evening, when some storms could be severe—with hail, damaging winds, the chance of an isolated tornado or two, and heavy rain.” At 9:15 AM, the National Weather Service issued another Tornado Watch, 446. I left the house at about that time, after having eaten breakfast and flipped through the paper for the day's headlines.

I hadn't looked at the weather page nor had I heard a report on the radio. I certainly hadn't checked the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Web site. But even if I had, tornadic predictions were fairly frequent in our area. Only before Hurricane Isabel, when forecasters predicted a direct hit on Arlington, did we clear the Adirondack chairs, flower pots, and barbecue grill from the deck.

At 12:50 PM, the National Weather Service issued its third Tornado Watch of the day, 447, for Washington, D.C., Northern Virginia, and other areas. At 1:55, a

blogger named Dulles ARC wrote on the Capital Weather Gang site: “Straight line winds a-coming . . . take down that umbrella on your patio furniture.”

At 2:15 PM, an unnamed reporter for the Gang wrote: “A line of thunderstorms with frequent lightning is moving into the far western suburbs, now approaching western Frederick, Loudoun and Fauquier counties.” Neil would say later that, at this time exactly, he stood outside the nature center building where he works in Fauquier County, thirty-five miles away from our house, and heard the wind coming. “Like a train in the distance,” he said. “Just like they always say.” A minute later, the wind blew through, stirring up the water in the pond and knocking over trees on the far side of the shore. (He discovered later that ten mature trees on the 200-acre property blew down.)

At 2:44 PM, B-rod wrote on the Gang blog: “Antie Em? Antie Em?” Ashburn said, “Torrential rain. Dark as night.” Someone noted that 59 mph gusts were reported at National Airport. At 2:55, the National Weather Service issued its fourth Tornado Watch, 449.

By about this time, with the green and ever-darkening skies, after the office buzz and some gathering together to look out windows, I decided to check in on the blog: “Sideways rain in Bethesda.” “Dark, dark, dark in DC.” “The weather outside my office in Reston 10-15 minutes ago was the worst weather I’ve seen in 15 years in the D.C. area. Straight-line wind like I’ve never seen before.”

Mot wrote: “Holy [expletive deleted]! Unless you are in central Mont[gomery] Co[unty] right now, you wouldn’t believe what we are witnessing if we tried to describe it to you. The thunder/lightning is so rampant it literally sounds like a giant running towards your house flickering a flashlight, as trees are just bending in half and the rain swirls. . . . Now all you hear is the sirens of fire trucks.”

Rallycap reported: “A huge old oak tree just fell on a car right outside my office in Dupont. Took a power line with it.” “Power’s out in Petworth,” another stated. Jen wrote: “Hail in Falls Church.” Dulles ARC: “Tornado was confirmed on the ground in Falls Church.” Apocalypse: “Here in Reston, hails the size of tennis balls . . . oops there goes my trash can.” Beck: “I am in an office building in Chantilly—when the storm hit here our super heavy-duty windows were bowing inward and outward.”

We did not witness such drama at the office in Arlington. Seemed like a half hour of heavy rain and some wind, and then it cleared, brightened, and became an ordinary day. I wrote and edited and managed projects another couple of hours, storm thoughts erased by phone calls and e-mails about work. I left the

office around 5:30 and headed to the outdoor mall, where I took my sweet time looking over the racks of spring fashions, and then I drove home in the sunshine.

I knew which tree Neil meant when he uttered those words—he didn't have to identify whether it was one of the cedars close to the house that provided shade on three sides, the scraggly black locust out front that I have always wanted to cut, the flowering dogwood succumbing to dogwood disease, or any of the others in our side yard. I knew which one.

It was one of the two trees we had strung a hammock between and enjoyed cool spring evenings beneath. The one whose bark had grown around an old squirrel perch. The one that shaded our backyard so that we had cultivated a plush green lawn of moss. The one that towered over our tiny house nestled in a patch of Arlington's preserved woods that made us feel we somehow lived away from it all. The one we had refused to cut, despite my fears, because we valued it so for its grace and beauty, and because each tree is so essential in the realm of nature's services to the earth.

One block from where I picked up Neil, police had cordoned off our block with yellow tape, but Neil got out and held it up for me, telling officers, "We live here," so I could drive through. Two houses before ours, a downed tree, uprooted to the east, parallel to the road, was so big and full of leaves, there was no sign of a house behind it. I pulled into our driveway and looked down the length of our wraparound front porch. Normally, in fall and winter, we can see the county bike trail in the park in the distance and the closer side trail near our backyard. But this day, branches filled in the view. Branches once very high in the sky, now low to the ground. Three trees down, in fact. All facing east.

From the deck, the dark brown behemoths lying across the entire fifty-foot width of our backyard and into both neighbors' yards were like slain dinosaurs. Two of the trees across our yard originated from our next-door neighbor's property to the left, and it appeared that they had taken down our tree. The crown of our oak extended halfway across our other next-door neighbor's property to the right, part of it through the roof. Apparently, a log big enough to kill a man ended up on the neighbors' bed, where fortunately Heather and three-and-a-half-month-old Carys were not napping that afternoon.

In fact, Heather and Carys had just come back from walking their dogs, Lucy and Shag, when she heard what she described as "a loud clap of thunder over the house." She decided the safest place to wait out such a storm was in the interior hall, and as

she rounded the bend to enter that hall, she saw the hole in the bedroom ceiling, a log on the bed, and water pooling all over the brand new hardwood floors. She grabbed the cell phone and called her husband at work in Maryland.

“There’s a tree in the house,” she cried, “from a tornado or something.”

When she glanced out the window, she could see only trees, not how many, not where they originated, not how much damage was done. Then she took Carys, the phone, and the dogs and holed up in the only room without windows, the bathroom they had just built, adjacent to the bedroom they had just renovated. While the four of them cowered in the four-by-six space, water soaked the bedroom mattress and seeped out of the room, into the hall, and under the bathroom door. Upstairs, unbeknownst to Heather, the wall in the baby’s room had split down the center, and a set of stairs had been ripped off the deck. From the bathroom, while thinking about Hurricane Katrina, feeling stranded and displaced, wondering whether and when her husband would make it home, she left a tearful message on my cell phone telling me she didn’t know if anything bad had happened to my house, and she could not go out to check.

I had my phone turned off and didn’t get the message until I was standing on my porch gazing at the display of nature’s power in our backyard, Heather and family long evacuated to her brother-in-law’s house on safer ground. Our destruction was minor in comparison to hers: damage to the deck roof, gutters, and soffit, a busted-up brick patio, and a bit of unleveling of our wraparound porch floor, partly due to its poor construction. The brick house itself, and in particular, the bedroom, remained untouched.

The next day, the *Washington Post* published a photo of the 1890s-era Victorian a block away, showing a large oak that had been ripped from its five-foot-diameter base and become embedded into the third floor of the house—also facing east. A week later, walking along the bike trail behind our house, we noticed another downed oak, two blocks away from ours, behind the funny long green house, also facing east, twisted and split as if by the fist of God, with splinters six feet tall at the base, suspended horizontally over a small gully. Indeed, so many nearby homes featured leaning or fallen trees that at the following weekend’s long-scheduled “neighborhood day,” when community members volunteer to open up their architecturally, historically, or decoratively notable homes for tours, I suggested we organize a disaster tour instead.

Though eleven tornadoes struck the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area on June 4, the trees in our neighborhood didn’t fall because of a tornado. They didn’t fall

because of the winds that some thunderstorms create. They didn't fall because they were rotten or shallow rooted or because the soil was saturated or because people didn't take care of them. They fell because of a weather phenomenon no one I know had ever heard of: a bow echo, part of a windstorm type known as a *derecho*.

Indeed, the National Weather Service called it in Tornado Watch 447: "Band of intense thunderstorms . . . will affect . . . Northern VA this afternoon. Strong westerly winds aloft and degree of instability indicate a risk of supercell storms capable of damaging winds. . . . Bow echo formation is also a possibility with an associated enhanced risk of damaging winds." And later, with a clear radar image of Cupid's red bow, in Tornado Watch 449: "Fast-moving bow echo currently approaching the DC metro area. . . . A significant threat for damaging winds is expected."

The word *tornado* derives from the Spanish word *tronada*, "thunderstorm," which in turn comes from the Latin *tonare*, "to thunder." Some believe the word reached its present form through a combination of the Spanish *tronada* and *tornar* ("to turn"), given that the main characteristic of this type of windstorm is its violently rotating column of air, which gives it its nickname, "twister." The word *derecho*, relatively unknown to the public as it is difficult to identify until well after the fact when all the data are in, was coined by a physics professor at the University of Iowa in 1888 to describe straight-line winds, based on the Spanish word that means "direct" or "straight ahead."

All thunderstorms—and all rain, wind, or any other type of weather—ultimately stem from the sun's energy, which creates humidity, low and high pressure, and the water cycle itself. Tornadoes and *derechos* both develop from thunderstorms. Tornadoes, considered to be local and small scale, originate from thunderstorms that develop into supercells, storms noted for their deep, continuously rotating updraft. *Derechos*, on the other hand, are widespread windstorms, occurring over hundreds of miles, and are made up of one or more bow echoes, thunderstorms, or bands of thunderstorms that singly or together form into the shape of an archer's bow because of the strong winds pushing them forward. Bow echoes are capable of producing straight-line winds that are as strong as tornadoes.

On June 4, the National Weather Service issued more than twenty-one Severe Wind Reports in Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., meaning winds were recorded at more than 58 mph, such as 59 mph in Arlington, 62 mph in Manassas, 63 mph in Reston, 64 mph in Fairfax, and 70 mph in the nation's capital. These winds traveled east from southern Indiana to Maryland. The one clearly visible

bow echo measured sixty-five miles in length from north to south, stretching from Hagerstown, Maryland, to Culpeper, Virginia, passing clear through Arlington. Though the entire bow echo generates strong winds, unknown forces can also create locally intense winds. The swath of wind that took our trees must have been no wider than ten feet across, for when it pushed over our neighborhood's towering oaks, it completely missed the hundreds nearby.

At some point, Neil and I had discussed the idea of cutting the tree, probably after a particularly stormy and angst-ridden night. No doubt that would have been an expedient solution. But what about the tree next to that, we pondered, and the others around the house, and the ones on park land near the house? And our neighbors' trees? And should every house cull its yard of its surrounding trees? Maybe we should live in the Plains instead of a deciduous Mid-Atlantic patch of woods once surveyed by George Washington. Or in a cave, perhaps.

Ultimately, I was willing to die in my sleep by that tree. I was not willing to insert myself and disrupt whatever fate had planned. In a way, I was enchanted by the mystery and majesty of nature, that which cannot be predicted or even explained. I cannot control everything, I reasoned; I will have to trust. And I loved that tree, branches cradling the air above us.

Within a few days of the storm, the neighbors to our left cut the downed trees at the property line, removed the two stumps, and repaired the fence. No one lives in that house; a property-management company has been refurbishing it for two years. No one over there misses those trees. No one even knows the difference.

Within a week, we and the right-side neighbors hired a company to remove the trees on our properties, as each of us are responsible for our own mess (insurance companies don't lay blame when damage is the result of acts of nature, and they covered us each separately and fully). Heather and I watched from my porch as a sixty-ton crane, parked in our shared driveway, carried eight-foot lengths of log over and between our houses to the curb, with the help of a Bobcat it had hoisted into our backyards, until dark. Then they removed and chipped the stump. Sunrise the next morning revealed that the heavy equipment had torn up what was left of our lovely moss lawn, and nothing but a great plain of bare soil and a pile of sawdust and dirt remained. Within a month, the yard filled in with a thick carpet of weeds.

As for the logs, most of their mass ended up being sold as mulch. Two winters' worth of wood ended up at a neighbor's house, one street over, for heating their home. My husband took some of the wood to work for the nature center's

woodstove. And, for a while, we kept some rounds in our yard as seats and scratching posts for our cat. A contractor who came to fix our deck four months later used them as workbenches, leaving stripes of white paint across each top. By December, we decided to split them for our own fireplace.

At the back end of our properties, in what is really park land, the various mammoth limbs and branches that fell in a jumbled mess haven't been moved. We and the right-side neighbors have not replanted, have not revegetated our grounds. Blue tarps, torn-out bamboo roots, pieces of fence and concrete still litter the yards. From our bedroom window, I still see passersby on the bike trail stop to point and gape at our trashy landscape.

But nights are quieter here now, at least in my own head. I hear dripping gutters, the patter of squirrel feet on the roof. I still see swaying trees in the distance. I am not afraid of the wind. I will never have to decide to intervene with fate: all the trees that could have built enough momentum to inflict damage are gone. Even one last smaller oak over the bedroom that the bow echo did not take, we had to cut—it had died because of all the trauma nearby.

But the sky is wide now, the land in need of reawakening. I have plans for a new yard. I want to build a garden. We have never had enough sun for much of a garden. I haven't, until now, desired to spend the time and energy to rototill a plot, plant and maintain a subsistence crop, cook from it daily, and can and freeze for the winter. We have friends with large kitchen gardens, whose kids pull carrots directly from the ground and eat them as snacks, and who prepare their own arugula salads and desserts made with homegrown lavender and melons. I suppose these are things I have subconsciously wished for, but with our two-car concrete driveway and our shady lot, they were never within reach.

Now I sink into sleep, thinking of raised beds, for a Lilliputian forest instead of one on high. Will I design them rectangular or curved? How early in the spring should we start? What kind of soil amendment will we use? Will I plant something I have never grown before? And will I know how much to water and how much to tend? And then I imagine the sun, high above like a great golden god, pouring its warm love into each of my tender plants—my broccoli and my Swiss chard, my delicate squash blossoms and chives, the same source that gives us rain, that gives us wind.

Notes on Contributors

ERIC AHO was born in 1966 in Melrose, Massachusetts, and educated at the Central School of Art and Design in London, England, the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, Massachusetts, the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, Cuba, and the Institute of Art and Design in Lahti, Finland. His recent museum exhibitions include the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Connecticut, the National Academy Museum in New York City, the Fitchburg Art Museum in Massachusetts, the Fleming Museum at the University of Vermont, and the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College. His work is represented in collections throughout the country, including the Fleming Museum, the Oulu City Art Museum in Finland, the Ballinglen Arts Foundation, Fidelity Investment Corporation, the Union Bank of Scandinavia, the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki, the North American Institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.

TRACI BRIMHALL has received the Halls Poetry Fellowship from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Tennessee Williams Scholarship from the Sewanee Writers' Conference. Her work has appeared in *Field*, the *Missouri Review*, *New England Review*, the *Southern Review*, and the *Virginia Quarterly Review*.

JACK BUSHNELL is an award-winning children's author and baseball essayist. His most recent book is *Farm Crossing*. His nonfiction, often with a science or nature focus, has appeared in *Elysian Fields Quarterly*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and *Tampa Review*.

WESTON CUTTER is finally moving back to the Midwest after too long a time away and has also recently developed a thrill for sushi (eel).

KRISTINA MARIE DARLING studies philosophy at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She is the author of several poetry chapbooks, most recently *Night Music* (BlazeVox Books, 2008) and *Strange Machine* (Gold Wake Press, 2009). Her awards include residencies at the Vermont Studio Center and the Mary Anderson Center for the Arts, as well as a scholarship from the Squaw Valley Community of Writers' annual poetry conference.

LISA DORRILL teaches art history at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. She received her PhD in art history from the University of Kansas, her MA from Northwestern University, and her BA from the University of Virginia. She has written and presented on a range of topics, including paintings and prints of environmental calamity in the 1930s, the influence of photography on New Deal art, and images of American homes in the prints of Currier and Ives.

SUE EISENFELD holds an MA in writing from Johns Hopkins University and a BS in natural resources from Cornell University. Her work has appeared in *Ars Medica*, *Potomac Review*, *Under the Sun*, and the *Washington Post* and has been syndicated, anthologized, and listed among the notable essays in *The Best American Essays 2009*. She is agonizing her way through the early stages of her first book. Her Web site is earthwordsweb.googlepages.com. She gives special thanks to Bob Johns, retired meteorologist with the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma, for helping her to get this right.

TOM ELLIOTT lives and writes in Brighton, Massachusetts. This is his second appearance in *The Gettysburg Review*. His nonfiction has also been published in the