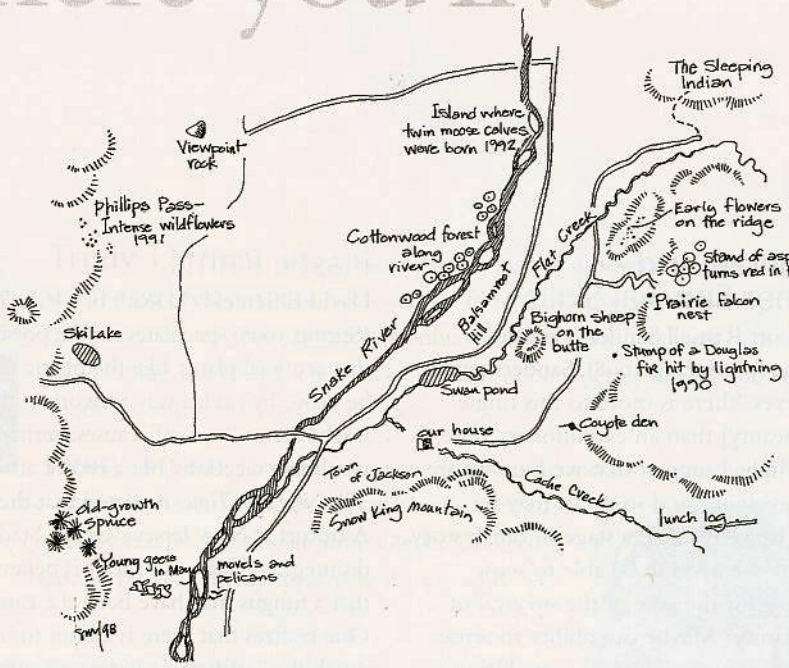
the place where you live



MAP: SUSAN LEE MARSH

JACKSON, WYOMING

On spring evenings after dinner, I walk at the National Elk Refuge. There I stretch my legs and clear my head after a day at my desk. There I see, in the first days of April, hundreds of elk, clusters of mule deer, a dozen buffalo, a flash of pronghorns, a pair of coyotes, a bighorn ram standing alone on the skyline. Red-tailed hawks spin overhead, a courting pair with locked talons. Sandhill cranes trumpet from the tall grass beyond my sight. Bluebirds flit from sagebrush to boulder, living droplets of the sky.

I walk with the wildlife as if I belonged.

The land feels young, the mountains freshly chiseled. Rivers tumble like eager children onto the valley floor. Living here makes me feel young too. Here, bears and cougars still prowl the margins of town. Here, I might still be prey.

Where I might still be prey, I must pay attention. This young land demands that I be a part of it, not imposed upon its surface like a handprint on a rock. My attention is rewarded with beauty, with wildlife. As I walk, I learn to belong.

—*Susan Lee Marsh*

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

It started with a notion that travel was the way to see the world. I built a career around it. And through my first decade of flight, I likened my movement to the migration of birds. That notion warmed the chill that came from always being somewhere else, always away, apart, alone; it gave my wanderings the ring of something near to natural.

Another decade of travel has planed away that fiction. I knew nothing of birds then. My method of migration, jet travel, blurred whatever wasn't moving at its own velocity: details of community, the ebb and flow of tides, the habits of birds—all smeared across consciousness like bugs across a windshield. Motion weakened the meaning of distance, difference, and dialect.

So, I've been watching birds more closely. In turn, they've shown me a kind of travel that isn't severed from place, but, rather, an expression of it: flight in sync with seasons—with temperature, angle of light, and the availability of food. Birds are bound to land through flight as tightly as a farmer to his field. They follow the sun and the seasons like shadows, their "home place" simply migrating beneath them.

I've learned from birds that to truly see the world I must reconnect myself to home, and to do that, break my addiction to motion. I took time off. I bought binoculars. I followed birds into the nooks and crannies of Santa Barbara County—a home once hidden from me—into oak woodlands, wetlands, and tight-walled canyons. Along free-flowing rivers and vernal pools. Along secret paths. I had known this chunk of southern California was more than beach, bikinis, and *Baywatch*; but I hadn't know it was half roadless and wild. Red-tailed hawks perch near sandstone cliffs etched with ripples from an Eocene sea. Hooded orioles hide among sycamore leaves as wide as bears. Ruby-crowned kinglets flit through alders and the tangled branches of chamise. A solitary ibis works among the reeds of a quiet coastal slough. As birds reveal themselves, so does my home. So does the world.

Habituated as I was to the view from 35,000 feet, the act of observing the smallest woodland birds feels molecular. I move slowly, if at all. I try to drift through pools of brittle oak leaves almost as quietly as the juncos, to recognize detail among shadow, to step with deliberation, to inventory a patch of ground one branch at a time. I've learned to connect the fluttering of wings with the basic elements of locality. And through those fluttering wings, I'm learning to trust myself to stillness.

—*Guy Hand*

TOPEKA, KANSAS

In late summer the rains come heavily. Two days here, a day there, five days straight, a burst of sunshine, then more rain. Water finds forgotten paths and creeks swell beyond their banks again, and then again. Water comes together with water, the ground sodden.

The creek called Shunganunga pass-

Prose, poetry, maps, drawings, photographs—capture the character of your place in five hundred words or less and send it to **The Place Where You Live.**