

SHERIFF'S
MEADOW
FOUNDATION

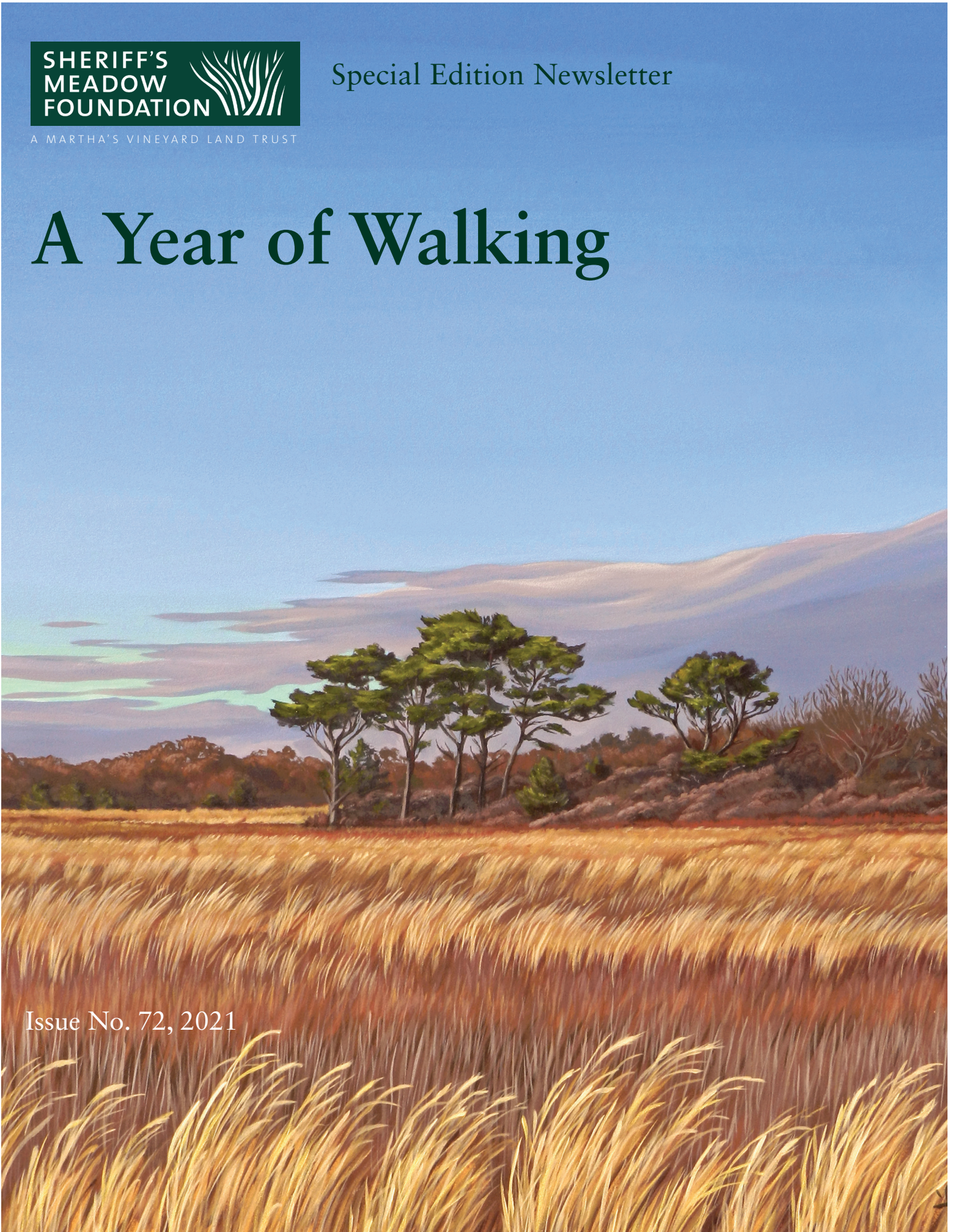


A MARTHA'S VINEYARD LAND TRUST

Special Edition Newsletter

A Year of Walking

Issue No. 72, 2021



Board of Directors

Peter Getsinger, *President*
 Alan Rappaport, *Vice-President*
 Walter Looney, Jr., *Treasurer*
 Bill Howell, *Assistant Treasurer*
 Hillary Noyes-Keene, *Clerk*

Chris Alley
 Stever Aubrey
 Peter Brooks
 Susannah Bristol
 Susan Crampton
 Mary Lou DeLong
 Matthew Dix
 Keith Dodge
 Robert Egerton
 Thomas Enders
 Lisa Foster
 Tara Gayle
 Ellen Harley
 Lizzie Horvitz
 Geoffrey Lauprete
 Elizabeth Packer
 William Plapinger
 Nancy Randall
 Thomas Rapone
 Phil Regan
 Aileen Roberts
 Thomas Robinson
 John Schaefer
 Carla Taylor-Pla
 Sara Tucker
 Alec Walsh
 Amy Weinberg

Honorary Directors

Emily Bramhall
 April Hamel
 Rez Williams

Staff

Adam R. Moore
Executive Director
 Kristen Geagan
 Susan Hughes
 Elizabeth Loucks
 Peter Rodegast
 Joseph Rogers
 Nancy Tutko

Editor

Kate Feiffer

Founded in 1959 by Henry Beetle
 Hough and Elizabeth Bowie Hough

Table of Contents

3	A Year of Walking	Kate Feiffer
4	A Walk in the Woods	Adam Moore
5	Cartoon	Paul Karasik
6	Love Letter	Nancy Slonin Aronie
9	The Good Soles	Naina Lassiter Williams
10	Let's Get Out of Here	Shelley Christiansen
12	Finding Nature's Sounds Amid the Noise	Nelson Sigelman
15	Walking Through Covid	Madeline Alley
16	From Spain to Cedar Tree Neck	Danielle Hopkins
19	We Had No Idea How Many Steps Lay Ahead	Maira Silva
20	Winter in the Meadow	Judith Hannan
22	Solvitur Ambulando: It is Solved by Walking	Laura Wainwright





“Into The Light” Painting by Kib Bramhall: 24”x30” Oil on linen, 2020

A YEAR OF WALKING

We walked. Sometimes steps were counted. Sometimes tears were shed. Friendships intensified. Fears were alleviated, at least temporarily. Nature’s splendor was noticed in new ways. Walking allowed us to connect when the consequences of connecting were unthinkable high. Walking as deep into the woods as a trail would wind became the antidote to chaotic news cycles and the drone of Zoom school and Zoom meetings. How many pandemic miles have been cumulatively logged on the Vineyard since March 2020? How many steps have we taken alone and together?

For this special edition of the Sheriff’s Meadow newsletter, we asked a sampling of Islanders who we knew to be walkers to reflect on the impact the Island’s trails had on them during this past year.

We are extremely grateful to the writers who took part in this issue and to the artists who contributed their work. We hope you enjoy the essays and the artwork in the following pages as we reflect on a year when life as we knew it was suspended and reshaped.

When the pandemic began, Sheriff’s Meadow Executive Director Adam Moore said,

“These lands were given for a purpose—to be sanctuaries. Their time has come. They are serving their intended purpose. The sanctuaries are here for us. And they will be here for us always, when this malady has passed, and bright and joyful days have returned. For those better days, these trails and sanctuaries give us hope.”

We invite you to keep walking, as the Vineyard’s trails have served us well and will continue to do so as we now begin our walk toward the future.

-Kate Feiffer, editor

A Walk in the Woods

By Adam R. Moore



One path passes through the pitch pines and black oaks that surround Trade Wind Fields Preserve, off County Road in Oak Bluffs. Another trail meanders through the “picnic woods” of Quansoo, a place of massive white oaks whose limbs twist and bend in every direction. Another begins in what was once a stand of red pines at Cedar Tree Neck Sanctuary, and plunges into the deep, verdant shade of a grove of American beeches. Yet another path, at West Chop Woods, traverses a stand of stately pitch pines, whose soaring stems and arching branches give the walker the impression of walking down the aisle of a forest cathedral.

Choose one of these forest paths, or any other of the plethora of such woodland

routes that the Island has to offer. Choose the path, find a companion, and walk. Then talk. The conversation is the destination.

During the pandemic, many of us found a walk in the woods to be one of the few safe and acceptable social activities. Traditional

Choose the path, find a companion, and walk. Then talk. The conversation is the destination.

social gatherings have been canceled or curtailed. Restaurants and bars are closed, or have been at limited capacity. Churches have been closed, or have required churchgoers to sit at safe, yet awkward, distances from one another. With options thus limited, people seeking social activity, across the

Island and across the nation, have taken to the woods.

We have learned that the woodland walk serves an important social function. Yet I believe that the woodland walk is more powerful than that. For some reason, the outdoor, forested setting provides the proper backdrop for whatever it is that really needs to be said, whether positive or negative.

Walking along an amber carpet of countless pine needles, a wife and husband converse. They walk along a marked and trodden path, yet their dialog explores the deepest depths of their marriage. They speak in confidence, to each other alone, with no worry that a child may be listening in.



On another path, this one in a woodland where oaks grow beside erratic boulders, walkers cross a footbridge and ask—and answer—the important questions. Will you join the Board? Or - will you step down? Will you serve? Will you help? If there is an important question to be asked, a walk in the woods is the place to ask it.

Winding through a woods of ancient, twisted oaks, after enough time, and a steady pace, even an introverted child begins to speak. Is it the sensory stimulation of each passing tree? Or the blur of the viburnum

understory? I've noticed that, with the quieter of my children, a walk in the woods

For some reason, the outdoor, forested setting provides the proper backdrop for whatever it is that really needs to be said, whether positive or negative.

draws the speech right out of them. In the confines of a house, a child can shut the door, and spurn a parent who wants to talk. Yet in the woods, the same child opens up.

In the quiet of the forest, we can speak, and

we can listen, and we can think. We can utter what can't be said in a crowded setting. We can share what should not be shared in an email. We can say what we mean, and say it only to whom we intend. The shy and introverted child can freely express what has been bottled up inside. Beyond the ears of our companion, our voice simply blends in with the wind rustling the pine needles above, and then is gone.

Adam R. Moore is the Executive Director of Sheriff's Meadow Foundation.



"But I am wearing a mask!"

Cartoon by Paul Karasik

Love Letter

By Nancy Slonim Aronie

This is my love letter to Sheriff's Meadow.

I don't know who you are. I guess I could check out your board of directors, your CEO, the list of angels who support you. But do you know how much you are loved, appreciated, valued?

When the pandemic hit, my husband, who usually commutes to Concord every Monday morning, stayed on the Vineyard for three uninterrupted months and during that time something radical—of course every day back then felt radically untethered—shifted in our lives. Joel is a tennis player and plays throughout the winter. If the courts are busy or closed, he hits at the backboard at the community center. He comes home ruddy-cheeked and joyous, repeating his pretend defeatist mantra, “the wall always wins.” And for my form of exercise, I swim laps. I love the silence. I do my best thinking and solving and asking the big questions while doing the Australian crawl, back and forth through the water.

But last February my husband got tennis elbow so he couldn't play anymore, and in March the Mansion House closed, so I couldn't swim anymore. I was frantic because I knew I was going to lose those introspective moments where resolutions to unsolved problems, answers to unasked questions, seemed to appear with the steady pull of my arms and the rhythm of my flutter kick. And where was I going to find silence? To say nothing of suddenly losing my workout regime.

Instead of swimming, I discovered the joys of Covid-baking. At first I burned the bottoms of my criss-cross peanut butter cookies, then they were too rare— yes, I know rare is a term used for cooking steak, not baking. But before long I had perfected them. What else could I do but eat them?

I began gaining what is now being called the covid-19. We were missing the endorphins we got from our usual fitness routines, and my underpants got so tight they



were stopping the circulation in my legs.

I had never really hiked or walked much, and actually had had an odd disdain for it as a form of supposed exercise. I had been a runner in my thirties and forties and when I would see walkers I remember thinking, oh please, what's the point!

So here we were, both of us being invited to make some kind of dramatic change so we could continue to care for our bodies and

walking seemed the only choice; the truth is we felt that walking was our consolation prize.

First we ambled down Flanders Lane, which is across from our house. It was nice and easily accessible, but a bit boring, so we started to branch out.

For the first time in our grown-up lives we had actual time and we decided to use it to explore the Vineyard on foot.



Our first foray was Peaked Hill. We were not yet in shape and the walk was a challenge, but it was so gorgeous that we were able to focus on the beauty instead of the pain.

We walked Peaked Hill with all its variations at least twenty-five times. There was always a new path, a new way forward. We didn't have to say it, but we both knew on some level these were metaphors for this, our new life.

We got to the point where instead of waking up and saying, "Should we walk today?" we said, "What time are we walking?"

There wasn't a moment that we didn't feel extreme gratitude for the luxury we knew we had, living safely in paradise, while the rest of the world was struggling to survive.

I bought a fitbit. My husband bought new sneakers and our days revolved around our

trail walks. When we found the many ways to Waskosim's Rock we thought we had died and gone to heaven. We took selfies and our smiles got broader, our hearts got stronger and our walks got longer.

The naturalist John Muir (Muir Woods) once said "I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in."

Well that's exactly what happened to me.

We fell naturally into walking in silence. I reclaimed what I thought could only be found in lane two of the Mansion House pool. Answers. Questions. Resolutions.

But we weren't rigidly silent. We were mostly silent. One of us would see a tree or a rock or we'd come to an open field so magnificent we had to share what we were feeling. And what we were feeling was the healing power of nature.

After the snowfalls this winter, we couldn't go into the woods for a while and we had to walk on the road. It was nice but we felt like we were missing something, something big—curves, little bridges and footpaths, meandering ups and downs, right brain, left brain; linear vs creativity.

So back to where I started.

Thank you dear Sheriff's Meadow and everyone who has anything to do with the obvious intentional care for the artistry, the grace, and the elegance of what you have managed. I forgive the arrogant young runner me. I totally get the point.

Nancy Slonim Aronie founded and runs the Chilmark Writing Workshop, is the author of "Writing From The Heart," is a commentator on NPR, and is currently working on a memoir.





The Good Soles

By Naina Lassiter Williams

During this past summer, a small group of lifelong friends began to ride bikes together in an effort to get exercise and enjoy one another's company. We happened to all be women, over 50 years old and Black. Our group was small and fluctuated in size depending on who was around to join us. In the midst of a pandemic, racial discord, political tensions, and so much more strife in the world, our bike excursions on this very special Island provided some solace.

In early October, a small blurb appeared in the Gazette calendar titled Saturday Morning Hikes sponsored by the Sheriff's Meadow Foundation and the Vineyard Conservation Society. One of the women in our biking group mentioned this and we thought it would be a nice alternative.

The first hike listed was for Cedar Tree Neck Sanctuary and a group of about 10 of us participated. For those who have hiked Cedar Tree Neck, you know how breathtakingly beautiful this trail is. All of us who walked that day were both wowed and hooked.

After our walk, while congregating in the parking lot and reflecting on the magnificence of our day, we decided to do a walk a week. Since our first outing, we have done just that.

With suggestions from William Flender's wonderful guidebook *Walking Trails of Martha's Vineyard*, we chose Menemsha Hills Reservation for our second hike. During that walk, we were discussing our sneakers and someone commented that she

had really good soles. We dubbed our group The Good Soles. Since that time, the size of our group has ebbed and flowed. We have had as few as three hikers, and as many as eighteen—all socially-distanced. Our explorations have included: Caroline Tuthill, Blackwater Pond, Mytoi Japanese Gardens, Waskosim's Rock, Manaquayak Preserve, West Chop Woods, Quansoo Farm, Fulling Mill Brook Preserve, and, most recently, Great Rock Bight Preserve.



At Great Rock Bight Preserve, amidst the dreariness of a gray day with brown leaves strewn along the path, we came across what appeared to be an altar with deliberately placed stones, a walking stick, feathers and brightly colored beads. What initially looked like a gravesite marking proved to be a plaque from the African-American Heritage Trail of Martha's Vineyard which read: "Rebecca, Woman of Africa . . . Born in Africa and enslaved in Chilmark, she married Elisha Amos, a Wampanoag Man, was the mother of Nancy Michael, and died a free woman in this place in 1800."

It was impactful to have happened upon this spot, particularly as a group of Black women whose good soles and good souls were walking freely on the shoulders of Rebecca and countless others.

We have enjoyed the gift of freedom, friendship, sisterhood (with an occasional male joining us) and the joys of socialization all while being cautious to comply with guidelines to be safe during these terribly stressful times. Without a doubt, 2020 has been

laden with challenges, worries, uncertainties, fears, and, at times, gloom. But amidst the chaos and turmoil, there have been joyful moments. Martha's Vineyard has many incredible vistas and we are fortunate to have organizations like Sheriff's Meadow, the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank, Vineyard Conservation Society, the African-American Heritage Trail and others offering us the opportunity to explore and learn about the vast terrain and history of this amazing Island.

With the recent uptick in Covid-19 cases and the urge to not gather indoors, we have been able to continue our weekend walks, which have provided much-needed spiritual nourishment and fellowship. As we approach the season celebrated for giving gratitude, we are mindful of our abundance of gifts. We are so blessed to be on this magical and beautiful Island of Martha's Vineyard with old and new friends and are grateful for all of the Island's keepers.

Naina Lassiter Williams lives in Oak Bluffs. This essay originally appeared in "The Vineyard Gazette."

Let's Get Out Of Here

By Shelley Christiansen



The world spun off its orbit. News of chaos and death fastened me to the television for days. The Twilight Zone had gotten real.

Let's get out of here, my husband said. Starved for air, space, light, and movement, we laced up our hiking boots and headed to that hill we always said we were going to climb someday but never had, figuring it would always be around and so would we. We ascended a forested trail, stretching limbs, grabbing toeholds on stones and roots, and sucking cool currents to the depths of our lungs. At the summit, the sky opened wide. I gazed down at waters speckled in sunlight. Clouds drifted on a blue theatre in the round. The universe knew nothing of ambulance sirens, calamity or fear—at least not on this mountaintop called Preikestolen, the priest's chair, 2,000 feet above a fjord in western Norway.

This was in September 2001, four days after the first world-class calamity of my privileged American life. So fresh, the thing was yet to be dubbed 9/11. Calamity No. 2—Covid-19—wouldn't rock my world for another 19 years, and when it did, life veered off orbit again. The governor held a press conference, and my Daytimer went blank. Work life screeched to a halt. Board meetings, commission hearings, dental appointments, yoga classes—gone. Birthday brunch at the Outermost Inn—canceled. My waking hours were barren but for, yet again, non-stop news of chaos and death.

Let's get out of here. Never mind that my nearest "mountain" is now wee Peaked Hill in Chilmark, elevation 311 feet. Never mind that my hiking partner of 9/11 is now but a remote pen pal. Never mind that the governor said stay at home.

Staying home can be a happy notion when it's your own; not so much when it's an order. Even less so when there's no end of staying at home in sight. For the attention deficient, baking and binge-watching get old fast. The novelty of Zoom? Cute but



not enough. Clean out a closet? Uhm, okay. Next? Watch the True Crime channel all day with Mom? Next!

Let's get out of here. Right. I laced up and headed out to walk. It's what I do, Covid or not.

I took to the roads just outside my door, as usual. They do not resemble nature trails, these in-town roads. They are paved and well-trafficked, but they'll do. The bike path helps.

I walked at my power speed, pumping arms, heart, lungs. Dodging unmasked cyclists and runners. Draining uncertainty from my pores.

On the best of the Covid walks, I remembered to stop and smell the *Rosa rugosa*. I slowed to admire the glow of a low sun on a white lighthouse. I trespassed at the end of a private dock for a sun salutation. Covid's little mercy was its timing. The vernal equinox. Daylight Savings Time. Resurrection. I took heart in the teeniest of signs that life goes on. The merry piccolo of the Carolina wren. Sprouting buds at the tips of branches. Courting waterfowl on Farm Pond. Pinkletinks, of course, and the return of the osprey to Harthaven.

And when I found I needed more, I hopped in my car and ventured further afield, to familiar treasures I'd neglected for a while. Inland trails with babbling brooks and stone bridges. South shore beaches, where tides flow with endless reassurance. I walked them farther than ever before.

In autumn, a friend's Facebook post stopped my scrolling in its tracks one night. She gushed about a hike she had just taken on some Island conservation trail with a bunch of buddies. Her photos showed about a half dozen people, on a lovely autumn palette somewhere. Though they all wore masks, I could tell: They were

grinning. They had so much fun, the post indicated, they planned to hike different trails together each week.

I wanted in.

Welcomed into the fold, I had the nerve to box everybody's ears right off the bat. You've been hiking on trails on Saturdays? During hunting season? Sundays become our new ritual.

Apart from being over 50, African-American and, with an occasional exception, female, we are a disparate bunch: Year-round Vineyarders as well as summer people who, in Covid's first year, lingered on-Island well into fall, winter and spring.

I was hardly the last of the newbies. We were many months into Covid by then, largely healed from the shock and awe of its initial assault. Yet we were just as many months into isolation, and even homebodies had become fed up with home. People still craved air, light, exercise and adventure, but we were perhaps starved most of all for human connection.

Apart from being over 50, African-American and, with an occasional exception, female, we are a disparate bunch: Year-round Vineyarders as well as summer people who, in Covid's first year, lingered on-Island well into fall, winter, and spring. Add the occasional weekend visitor. We are artists, physicians, educators, attorneys, financial consultants, event planners, real estate brokers, and executives of non-profits. We are wives, singles, mothers. Knee surgery survivors and avid runners. A few trail fashionistas, worthy of an L.L. Bean catalogue shoot. Someone clever among us named us The Good Soles.

With the Soles, I have discovered I'm not as hip to the island's trails as I thought I was. Moreover, new trails have snuck up on the landscape while I wasn't paying attention.

Sure, I knew the trail through Cedar Tree Neck, but I didn't know that other trail through Cedar Tree Neck. And since when did that Land Bank trail connect with that Sheriff's Meadow trail in Quansoo?

Our mapping apps tend to befuddle us, and we sometimes get separated at a fork. We laugh about these things. It's an island. How lost could we get?

I've known a few of the Good Soles since we were summer teens hanging out on State Beach and Circuit Avenue. Others I've known but a few years. Still others I've met for the very first time while hiking, and I remain clueless about what they look like unmasked.

We've all come to know each other better over time. Because when we're not marveling at, say, a preening wolf tree or concentrating on a slippery slide down a North Shore bluff, we're sharing ourselves with one another. In spontaneous pairings, we might ruminate about offspring or elders. Vegan recipes. A Netflix series. Politics. Experiences we've had in common. I have likely missed sight of a rare raptor or lady slipper orchid on account of paying rapt attention to a companion.

We make little mention of Covid. The thing that got us hiking together in the first place.

Should Dr. Fauci ever declare that Covid is eradicated from the planet and life can go back to absolute normal, The Good Soles will still hike, if only once in a while. I am sure of it. I will still walk solo, too. In familiar territory and new frontiers. Because sometimes the main thing I need to know better is myself.

Shelley Christiansen is a real estate broker and published writer of essays and feature articles. The native New Yorker lives in Oak Bluffs and thrives Island wide.

Finding Nature's Sounds Amid the Noise

By Nelson Sigelman

The sound was deafening. Caw. Caw. Caw. Hundreds of crows, swirling black shadows in the darkening sky, called to each other overhead as I sat in a treestand. My small platform about twelve feet off the ground in a Chilmark woodland was a good vantage point from which to watch the flock engage in their nightly ritual of settling on a communal roost.



For those of us of a certain age surrounded by screeching birds, an obvious point of reference would be the 1963 Alfred Hitchcock film *The Birds*, in which crazed seagulls attacked Tippi Hendren.

I wasn't worried. I held a vintage Island twelve-gauge Browning humpback shotgun, but I hoped the crows would go elsewhere. The aerial din made it impossible to hear the snap of a twig underfoot that would alert me to the approach of a deer in the thick vegetation.

After about ten minutes the crows, for reasons known only to them, flew off to a place more to their liking. I sat still, ears pricked. It was dusk quiet. I cocked my head to the rustling of leaves off a nearby path. By the shuffling quality of the sound I identified its source as a squirrel. I relaxed a bit—I'd been fooled before. But no deer

approached that day.

A city kid raised in Boston, in my youth my idea of wildlife was pigeons in the bus station. I never entertained the notion that one day I would be able to differentiate between the sound of a squirrel looking for an acorn from a deer walking through the woods, or care to distinguish between the two.

My embrace of the Island's rich fishing, waterfowling, and deer hunting traditions—I had never handled a bow or firearm before I moved to Martha's Vineyard thirty-two years ago—has made me appreciate our natural environment. An unwillingness to participate in

these pursuits does not preclude one from enjoying nature. But for me, hunting and fishing have been entry points to wonderful outdoor experiences I've enjoyed in the many hours I've spent on the beach, in duck blinds and tree stands on some of the

How can I hear the call of a redtail hawk in the fall when nearby a man is herding leaves using a high RPMs, screaming, two-cycle engine pushing out a jet of air at approximately 200 miles-per-hour strapped to his back?

Island's loveliest properties, even in the foulest weather.

Years ago, when my dog Tashmoo was alive, I spent many mornings scanning the dawn sky for ducks at the Long Point Wildlife Refuge, 633 acres of woods, salt marsh, pond, and barrier beach donated to

The Trustees of Reservations in 1979 by the three remaining members of the Tisbury Pond Club, founded in 1912 with an initial purchase of 470 acres.

What an adventure it was to walk through the marsh in the early morning darkness. As the dawn light slowly illuminated the dunes, my hunting companion Alley Moore and I would hurriedly set out a spread of cork decoys while our Labrador retrievers, Tashmoo and Emmett, barked with excitement. Every bit of their DNA said that fetching a mallard in the cold water was what they were born to do.

Most days during the fall deer hunting season, which runs from early October to the end of December, I sit in a tree and contemplate my good fortune. I am on a beautiful property, and I am still physically able to climb into a tree. More often than not, I don't see a deer, but when I exit the woods at dark to the haunting sound of the diminutive whippoorwill, I am satisfied that I've had a successful day.

Experienced hunters and fishermen pay attention to the natural rhythms that spell the difference between success and failure. The ripples that mark a tide shift that will trap bait and attract gamefish. A change in wind direction that will carry scent and alert a

deer to human presence. I have learned to listen carefully. My wife Norma insists, with some justification, it is a skill I exercise only when hunting and fishing.

One warm, foggy summer night, friend and

legendary Island fisherman Cooper "Coop" Gilkes and I set off to fly fish for striped bass on the flats off the Sheriff's Meadow Little Beach property in outer Edgartown Harbor. The barrier beach extends like a bent arm around Eel Pond. We walked to the elbow and slowly waded out.



Even large stripers will feed close to shore at night. A glowing headlamp is a sure way to send fish scurrying. We moved stealthily, shadows in the darkness, illuminated only by the light of the stars and a crescent moon.

I heard a faint sound in the fog, distinct from the wind and the waves.

“Coop,” I said. “Listen.”

The sound was unmistakable. “Baloop.” “Baloop.” We waded in that direction and found a school of stripers inhaling sand eels off the surface of the water. The difference between a poor night of fishing and a spectacular night was a hundred yards or so.

Unfortunately, I find the natural sounds I appreciate are, these days, too often drowned out by outdoor noise. How can I hear the call of a redtail hawk in the fall when nearby a man is herding leaves using a high RPMs, screaming, two-cycle engine

pushing out a jet of air at approximately 200 miles-per-hour strapped to his back?

People having cell phone conversations while walking down a trail ... “Yes, I’m on Martha’s Vineyard ...”, yappy dogs, yappy people calling quiet dogs that they would not have to call if Fido was leashed as required by the property rules.

I find refuge in those conservation properties less traveled. And I do the once unthinkable to me: No fishing rod, no weapon, I take walks for the sake of walks.

I had to do something, after all, to offset the expanded caloric intake due to quarantine boredom that in turn had inspired lots of baking once deer hunting season ended in December and before the arrival of striped bass in mid-April.

My Vineyard Haven neighborhood of small homes littered with the sort of debris—

plastic buckets, boat trailers, and blue tarps—that indicate year-round residency is a quick hike away from the entrance of a trail that bisects the 90-acre West Chop Woods property. My preferred route takes me to the West Chop Club flag pole that overlooks Vineyard Sound and back. It’s just the right amount of exertion to ease my guilt over a tray of freshly baked cinnamon buns slathered with cream cheese icing, and not making a sound.

Nelson Sigelman, a former newspaperman, is the author of “Martha’s Vineyard Outdoors, fishing, hunting and avoiding divorce on a small Island” and “Martha’s Vineyard Fish Tales, How to catch fish, rake clams, and jig squid, with entertaining tales about the sometimes crazy pursuit of fish.”





Walking through Covid

By Madeline Alley

Yesterday I told my mom (editor of this issue) I would not write an essay for her about walking during the pandemic, shuddering at the thought of thinking back and having to relive any part of the past year. Today I am sitting on hold with Argos because my blender just died mid-smoothie, thinking about how to dispose of a half blended, chunky yet soupy, green slop. From six months on Martha's Vineyard last spring and summer, to a fall in London, and now a spring in Dublin, two of the only consistent things about my days have been walks and smoothies. Until today, of course. I took a morning walk along the Grand Canal in central Dublin, lined by cherry blossom



trees, with a surprise visit from the Irish sun. Unfortunately, my lunchtime smoothie is not quite as satisfying nor successful today.

Growing up on Martha's Vineyard, nature provided the entertainment that the winter closures deprived me of. From building fairy houses, family walks, beach days, bike rides that turned into horse-back trail rides, and trespassing in the dead of winter to steal a sunset, I cannot think of a day on Martha's Vineyard that I have not been lucky enough

to play in the ocean, woods, or farms.

When I picked a college five years ago, I knew that I needed nature. More importantly, I knew that I needed the ocean at my fingertips. I moved across the world to a small Scottish seaside village, not too

The fresh air was filtered through our masks, the nature filtered through our inevitable tears over a canceled senior year.

different from Oak Bluffs. My dorm room views spanned the Old Course, the *Charlotts of Fire* beach, and the quaint golfing pubs, but could not compare to Menemsha Hills. When friends asked what it was like growing up on an island, what we did in the winter, I would say we took nature walks.

When friends would visit, I would take them on nature walks.

Last March, my senior year of college was cut abruptly short. After a panicked transatlantic flight home I spent a long couple of months finishing my neuroscience degree from my back porch in Oak Bluffs. Masked up, with my "going out" sweatpants on, my mom and I would take daily walks every afternoon. Slowly these expanded to afternoon

walks with my best friend, her two dogs in tow. Somehow, after 22 years on Martha's Vineyard, we found new spots, our favorite being Tea Lane Nursery. The fresh air was filtered through our mask, the nature filtered through our inevitable tears over a canceled senior year, but these walks provided us with the movement, laughs, banter, and change of scenery that got us through the year. We celebrated thesis submissions at Lambert's Cove, and college graduation by jumping off the Jaws Bridge.

We spent the summer nannying, running around Quansoo, Cedar Tree Neck, and Sengekontacket with a gaggle of Island kids. Every sunset was accompanied by sandy toes and a beach dinner. Every day washed away with the salty water we all love.

Now I live in Dublin. My daily walks are on city sidewalks, but my riverside picnics are still terrorized by seagulls. Walking has been unexpectedly emotional for me in the past year. It began

as a time to reconnect daily with my mom after spending most of the past four years in another country. It evolved into an energetic release of tears that accompanied the stress of the pandemic, college graduation, and insecurity about when I would get a fireman's hamburger again after the fair was canceled.

Over the summer, my daily walk could be as short as a State Beach path, or as long as the Great Rock Bight trail, but regardless they would end with potato chips and sandwiches in my happy place. From Edgartown, we walked with croissants and iced coffee. From Oak Bluffs, we walked with slowly melting ice cream cones in one hand, pulling our bikes with the other. From Chilmark, we rode horses over the ridge. From Aquinnah, we walked cliffside and from West Tisbury, we walked waterside. From six feet apart, we took walks with our loved ones, friends and family, and got to enjoy more than nature.

Honestly, I have chosen to forget a lot of the thoughts and sorrows that Covid brought us all, but what I remember are the sunsets we had time to appreciate, the picnics we got to celebrate, the cold ocean swims we jumped into, the sea glass we collected, and the flowers we picked.

Madeline Alley attended the University of St. Andrews and is now getting a Master's Degree in Neuroscience.

From Spain to Cedar Tree Neck

By Danielle Hopkins





I was sitting in the Madrid airport with two friends I had known for less than two months when I realized my time abroad was truly over and that I would spend the rest of my semester, and possibly summer, at home on Martha's Vineyard. Little did I know then that I would end up spending more than a year on the Island, taking classes remotely, to complete my senior year of college. This has been a challenging time for all of us as we try to navigate a pandemic and find out the most comfortable and most effective ways to stay safe. For me personally, being able to walk along the many paths and trails the Island has to offer has helped me keep some semblance of sanity.

While in Spain I worked in a nursing home twice a week in the morning, helping the residents with memory games and having conversations to keep them thinking and alert. One day we all got an email informing us that we no longer could come because of the Covid-19 virus. It was then that I knew this was not going to blow over, or just be something we all ignored. A week later I was scrambling to find a plane ticket, as flights were getting canceled left and right. I ended up taking the last train from Seville to Madrid and spending the night in the airport with two friends who were on the same flight.

When I finally arrived on the Island my dad handed me a mask and sanitized my suitcases before allowing me in the car. It felt like I had entered a science fiction movie and the world was ending. My grandmother lives with us, and my parents had me quarantine in my uncle's apartment above his garage for two weeks. It was during this time that I found new ways to deal with the stress and isolation I would end up experiencing for the next year.

After I got back to the Vineyard, I spent almost all of my day on Facetime with my friends from school and the new friends I made in Spain, but I still felt on edge and anxious. I knew I obviously couldn't go

anywhere or spend time with people since I was quarantining, so I tried exercising inside and outside, in my uncle's backyard, but that didn't help to alleviate my stress. I eventually started going on walks in his neighborhood and down paths near his house, and it was then that I finally started feeling better. Being able to be outside and take in the fresh air and move my legs honestly was life changing. I felt like I could finally work through my thoughts and spend meaningful time alone, as opposed to sitting on the pull-out couch trying to distract myself. I was actually starting to feel better and even felt hopeful about the entire situation.

After the two weeks were over and I finally returned home I continued finding places to walk and explore, both near my house and all over the Island. The social interactions I had last spring were mostly during walks through the woods or on the beach. My friend Ruby, who I have known since preschool, and I would go to different paths and try to find new trails to explore; we talked about how crazy everything was and wondered whether we would get to be back on campus for our senior year of college.

One of our favorite places to walk was Cedar Tree Neck and we have spent many hours walking along the different trails there. Those times were important to me, as everyone kept reminding me that we had to figure out a 'new normal.'

During the summer both of my jobs were "in-person," so I was able to see people with masks and do more social distancing, and it definitely helped to have more interactions. Ruby and I still went on walks every week, and I'd go in the woods by myself near my house to clear my head.



Walking had become part of my routine, and a pattern I wouldn't break throughout the entire year.

As summer turned into fall and some of my friends left the Island, going on walks is what allowed me to continue taking my classes online, as painful as that was. I found it difficult to focus on my work as I studied in my childhood bedroom. I would spend all my time in the same place and would get so distracted by every little thing that the idea of doing homework just stressed me out. But after going on a walk to clear my head and breathe in fresh air, doing my homework seemed a bit more manageable.

The Island's trails and paths have become an important part of my Covid-19 experience as they have helped me to work through all the different thoughts and emotions that this pandemic has brought up.

Danielle Hopkins is a 21-year-old college senior who grew up in Oak Bluffs.



Penelope Thorton in a tree at Sheriff's Meadow Sanctuary



We Had No Idea How Many Steps Lay Ahead

By Moira Silva

On March 14, 2020, my family began our first day of lockdown with what would become the first of many afternoon walks. We took a long, leisurely stroll through Tradewinds, where we found stray golf balls, smiled at some passing border collies and picked up litter. That meandering journey filled us up on a day which felt monumentally disorienting. If we had this—each other and these beautiful trails—things would be okay, right?

We had no idea how many steps lay ahead.

During our daily afternoon walks, we began sensing the promise of spring. There might be a hint of warmth in the air, some budding daffodils or the blessed sound of

After hiking for two hours one April afternoon, he wondered aloud, “Where have I been all these years?”

pinkletinks—we never knew what we’d find until we got out there. Even walks on the windy, gray days were satisfying as we realized how lucky we were to have somewhere to go while our friends in New York City couldn’t risk leaving their apartments.

Discoveries abounded: a preserve we hadn’t heard of (a visit to a trail in Aquinnah made us feel like we were on vacation), the new trailhead at our treasured Cedar Tree Neck, and the breathtaking sight of returning osprey. Once, while on a trail jaunt, my youngest son gathered choice sticks and pinecones for his kindergarten assignment—to build a fort based on the book “Roxaboxen.” Another time, my oldest son took pictures for his 4th grade geometry class—a slew of shots depicting angles exhibited in nature. Thanks to him, we saw the shape of familiar trees in a new way.

My husband pointed out spots where he used to camp as a child. After hiking for

two hours one April afternoon, he wondered aloud, “Where have I been all these years? Here is the miracle of spring and I’m experiencing it with my family instead of sitting at my desk.” It was on the trails where we all caught glimpses of Covid’s silver linings.

We were free out there. The kids could pick which color trail we took. We had Daylight Savings hours on our side and nothing to rush home for. “Could we make it to the Sailor’s Graveyard this time?” the boys would ask. “Sure, let’s give it a try!” These newly carefree parents responded. Out there I could be their mom again, not their newly bundled educational, counseling, cafeteria and custodial staff.

Things didn’t feel quite so scary. Our phones, with their flurry of doomsday updates, stayed locked in the car. Our masks were tucked in our pockets. We felt like ourselves.

Our world felt open and fresh. And each step gave us hope that things would shift for the better if we all just kept doing the best we could.

When the boys grew weary of daily walking or ached for the joy of the lacrosse practices they were missing, we would add a scavenger hunt, a prize for walking 10,000 steps (ice cream sundaes anyone?), or an incentive-based passport for exploring new trails.

After hikes, our legs ached and our hearts soared. We felt strong, refreshed, and connected.



Our trails were there for us when almost nothing else was. They caught our fears and helped transform them to faith. They were nature’s Prozac—calming, steadying, renewing.

Recently, my oldest child asked me what the best age is to experience a pandemic. I couldn’t answer. But I could, with confidence, tell him the best place to experience a pandemic.

Moira Silva is a writing instructor, consultant, avid trail runner and co-founder of Covid Monologues MV: A Project to Nourish, Inspire & Connect.

Winter in the Meadow

By Judith Hannan



The morning begins with the divide between darkness and light. It begins with the freshly risen sun painting the tips of the dried meadow grasses outside my window in gold. It begins with two sets of canine eyes watching for the moment my own will open and we can step out into a new day at Sheriff's Meadow's Stonewall Beach Preserve.

I am not always eager to greet the day, days when I don't feel painted by the sun and the beseeching eyes of the dogs are more burden than joy. But it is the burden that brings, if not joy, then a reclamation of a self that drifted away during sleep.

On this particular morning, the ground is covered in snow. The freshness is like fuel for the dogs who race, nose to the ground, adding their tracks to the criss-cross and zig-zag of prints laid during the night. I recognize deer and rabbits and geese, but I

am not a tracker and don't know the source of other indentations. Raccoon? Skunk? The black cat that walks across the tops of the old stonewalls marking the boundaries of bygone farms, built out of rocks pulled from the earth to create pasture for grazing?

Rocks continue to heave themselves up from underground, pushed by the freezing and expanding soil. I see one, newly arrived, in the middle of my route and wish there had been a time lapse camera to document its birth.

The dogs are circling the scent of an animal that had passed by earlier. The "X" that marks the spot eludes them the way the source of an itch can elude me sometimes. We continue to the beach. The waves are small. The surfers can sleep in. Only seabirds are riding the swells, their cries sounding mournful and ancient.

I worry about the day when my nearly sixty-eight-year-old arms, shoulders, and torso won't have enough strength to make it through.

On this particular morning, the air is calm, the sun adding warmth to the 26 degree air. I approach the rise in the path that takes me back home and see that the surface of Stonewall Pond is unruffled. I feed the dogs, change into warmer gloves, and am back out the door, now striding the path that takes me to the pond where my kayak waits. There is more ice than I expected. What the kayak can't break through it



glides across with ease. Once in clear water, clouds reflect on the surface, and I am suspended between two worlds, beneath and over the sky simultaneously.

I fight against the rush of the incoming tide funneling through the small channel that will take me to Quitsa Pond. I worry about the day when my nearly sixty-eight-year-old arms, shoulders, and torso won't have enough strength to make it through. The boats and moorings in residence during the summer have all been pulled from the water. I am alone, although the sound of cars on State Road and the surrounding houses, empty on this day, remind me the Vineyard is a human habitat. As always, I am conflicted about my right to be here while loving the meadow, sea, and pond so much I wish my arms were long enough to embrace it whole.

Winter is a time for ducks. My favorite is the Bufflehead, so easy to recognize with its white markings and oversized head. I want them to know I am not the enemy, but they flee long before I am close enough to be a threat, their wings singing as they take flight. The ubiquitous geese are braver; they honk and complain but are willing to give up only a few inches of their territory.

I make my way to Menemsha Pond, out to the very middle, where I rest my paddle across my lap and drift. I breathe. This will be my meditation today. I listen. I think I hear people talking far away but it is the low chatter of seagulls going about important business. I stare into the water's depth. I wonder why I have never seen a horseshoe crab when I see so many dead ones on land. Some fish break the surface and try to pretend I am not witnessing a slaughter, big fish eating smaller ones.

It is hard to turn back. I can't stay here forever, but the only way to get home is to make a conscious decision to turn, retrace, reenter. This is not a place that favors that kind of thinking. I like circles better. So I meander for a bit, making a 90 degree turn before committing to the full 180.



The tide and a rising wind are with me so I can rest a bit as the shore glides by. The ice has melted by the time I return. I have to haul my kayak up a slight incline, and as I pull and lift I wonder again about how many more years my strength will remain.

On my walk back home through the frosted meadow I indulge in a little self-admiration. I have worked hard. My nose is red. My fingers and toes are a little numb. But my lungs are swirling with clean, fresh air. I bow to those lungs knowing that so many are struggling to take a breath of stale hospital air.

At night, I will don my sky watching outfit of multiple layers, hat, gloves, and down blanket and lie under the stars. Orion has been making its way across the sky, allowing the constellations of spring and summer to enter. The meadow will burst with life and sound. I will be walking and kayaking, watching and listening.

Judith Hannan is a writer and teacher who lives in Chilmark and New York, the former taking over the lead from the latter.

Solvitur Ambulando: It Is Solved By Walking

By Laura Wainwright

“Let’s walk the field at Duarte’s Pond with Rose then sit on a bench and meditate.” my friend Laura Murphy texted on March 17, 2020.

“Yes!” I texted right back.” I’d just returned from a writing retreat in New Mexico. When I left in late February, Covid seemed far away. By the time I flew home, it was here. I was quarantining from my husband. We slept in separate rooms, took turns in the kitchen, stayed six feet apart. Everything felt new and dangerous.

The following morning, Rose, my yellow lab ran free, but Laura and I were careful to walk six feet apart. While we walked, we discussed hand washing, gargling, and how difficult it is to not touch your face. We worried our way around the Hoft farm fields, in West Tisbury, wondering how long this all might last and when would it be safe to see, much less hug, our adult children living off-Island?

Two bluebirds caught our attention. They were balanced on wavering stalks of grass and we watched them drop to the ground for bugs, then lift back up to a branch of a nearby oak tree. The shimmering blue backs of bluebirds and sturdy round bodies have always lifted my spirits. I had no idea that morning how important these birds and that stab of joy would become.

“Let’s sit there,” Laura said, pointing to a flatbed trailer in the middle of a field. I surveyed the open space. Although we’d meditated together for several years, it was always at her house or mine, never in public.

“Sure,” I shrugged. We sat at opposite ends of the flatbed and I got Rose to lie down next to me.

Laura set the timer on her phone for ten minutes. “Ready?”

The bell dinged and I closed my eyes. At first my mind raced. I felt exposed, vulner-

able, but gradually I focused on the bird songs and the breathing of my friend, and I relaxed.

“Walking and sitting work well together,” I said as we were getting into our cars. “One takes you out; the other in. Is there anything I have that you need?”

“A few cans of cat food would help,” Laura said.

“I’ll bring six. Do you have extra toilet paper?”

She nodded. We dawdled. Not ready to go. I worried about Laura living alone. “Can you sleep?” Laura asked. “I’m having trouble sleeping.”

“I can’t sleep or read.”

“See you in a few days.”

“I had no idea that morning, how important these birds and that stab of joy would become.”

One meeting led to another and another. Soon we were meeting every other day. We’d walk an hour or so and then find a bench, rock, or tree limb where we could sit for ten of fifteen minutes. Spring unspooled slowly. Has there ever been one more beautiful? And quiet. There was no construction. There were no leaf blowers, no chain saws, no airplanes, very few cars. With machine noise on hold, we listened to water move in a creek, wind singing through the birches, and varieties and nuances of bird song.

Living through this pandemic has required an exhausting vigilance. It was also lonely. Laura and I showered one another with small comforts. I sent funny postcards, arrived for our walks with chicken soup, orzo salad, and copies of Science Times. Laura brought scallops, oysters, miso, and the occasional novel, knowing I was struggling

to read anything other than the devastating news.

“Dear Sitting/Walking friend,” I wrote to her in April, “You are helping me navigate this strange viral terrain. Thank you. I look forward to our tromps around the field (osprey, swan, tree swallow, great blue heron, robin, jay, bluebird) and our quiet sits on the trailer no matter what the weather. I love you.”

This Covid year, from mid-March to mid-March we walked and sat more than 100 times. From the tip of Aquinnah to Edgartown harbor, we’ve strolled beaches along the ocean and Vineyard Sound. We’ve crossed open fields, noodled along moss-lined streams, and visited beech-filled woodlands. Some places we went only once. Others we returned to again and again, savoring our growing intimacy.

The days I didn’t see Laura, I walked anyway. I haven’t missed a single day. I’m fierce about it. Walking helps me push past my fears, steadies and calms my busy mind. I’ve learned now to trust that somewhere along the trail the flash of wing, often a bluebird’s, or feel of a moss-covered rock, or even the whiff of a blooming witch hazel will nudge me into the present. For a moment, maybe just a breath or two, engagement with beauty will return me to wonder, to gratitude.

Walking every day changed me. I believe it’s changed Laura, too. Looking back over our text messages, I notice in the beginning, we’d jimmy the time, change the day, or beg off on account of rain. That doesn’t happen anymore. When we make a plan, we keep it. We don’t question it. When it’s time to meet, we’re there — pouring rain or heavy snow. Walking and sitting make the pandemic easier to bear. We’re resilient now. We show up.

One recent morning, a year into the pandemic, our plan was to meet at the Quan-



soo parking lot at 9:00 am. The thermometer in my bedroom read 24 degrees. A strong wind blew from the west. “Don’t you want to reschedule?” my husband asked. I shook my head. “Well at least take your warmest coat.”

Laura and I were both five minutes early. March light dazzled the dune grass. A female marsh hawk glided low along the dunes.

“Thank you for your postcard,” Laura said as we got out of our cars and put on our masks. Our first vaccine is behind us, but we remained careful, still kept apart.

“What did I say? ”

“You sent that Latin phrase of St Augustine’s: Solvitur ambulando. It is solved by walking.”

We laughed.

“True. Isn’t it? Got your mason jar?” She tapped her pocket. “Good. I brought tea.”

We put on hats and mittens and crossed over the bridge to the beach. The wind was at our back as we walked the tilted beach to the opening. We stood a long time watching the pond water pour into the salty ocean. The shadows of the sand bluff were the strongest color of all, dark green, almost black. Finally we turned and headed back along the pond shore. Rose, splashing in the water, ran ahead. The wind was strong, but we didn’t care. It felt clean and fresh. In the parking lot, we opened the hatches of our station wagons and sat, legs dangling down, on our rear

bumpers. It was a perfect place to meditate.

When the final bell rang, Laura said, “Doing this is always surprising and always worth it.”

“I know.” I heard the lift in both our voices. “Do you need anything?”

“Not a thing. Do you?”

I shook my head.

Laura Wainwright, author of “Home Bird: Four Seasons on Martha’s Vineyard,” lives in West Tisbury.



Sepiessa Cove, Painting by Laura Clancy Murphy, 12” x 9” Oil on Panel, 2019



A MARTHA'S VINEYARD LAND TRUST

PO Box 1088
Vineyard Haven, MA 02568
www.sheriffsmeadow.org

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Printed locally on recycled paper
using 100% vegetable-based inks

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit # 601
Brockton, MA



Finley Goulart with Uncle Billy Sweeney, Photo by: Danielle Ewart

Artist Bios

Jack Yuen is an Island grown artist and Rhode Island School of Design graduate. Jack's work has been shown in local galleries, the MV Hospital and the MV Museum. The painting on the cover was originally part of Vineyard Conservation's community art project "love it. protect it. mv"

Paul Karasik is a two-time Eisner Award winning cartoonist whose cartoons appear in *The New Yorker*; he lives in West Tisbury.

Kib Bramhall is a longtime Vineyard resident and former board member of SMF. Kib is a professional painter whose primary subject matter is nature, particularly on Martha's Vineyard.

Laura Murphy retired from a long career as a certified nurse-midwife, and more recently as the Vineyard's public health nurse; for the past few years she has been painting in West Tisbury.

Thank you to our contributing photographers:

Stephen Chapman, Kate Feiffer, Judith Hannan,
Danielle Hopkins, Lanny McDowell.

"Quansoo Meadow" Painting by Jack Yuen: 16" x 20" Acrylic on Wood