Reflection

By CMarie Furhman

It's a game I like to play. A way I test myself.

Out in the woods, atop a peak or along a winding stream, I lie down and close my eyes. I allow my other senses to take over. I inhale deeply. I listen beyond my thoughts and my heartbeat, past the sound of panting dogs. I put my hands on the earth and touch it; I feel the parts of my body where it supports me. Hips, shoulders, back, thighs. Head. What does the ground feel like? Pine needles or cobble? Snow or grass? Then, I open my eyes. This is when the test begins. What if , Rip Van Winkel-like, I had fallen asleep here? Could I, by the smell, sounds, feel, and sight of my surroundings, know where, and in which month, or at least season, I have awoken?

Last night I played again. The first sound (heard primarily due to my disdain of them) was the buzz of mosquitoes. Then it was the whir and chirp of wings, a winnowing snipe. The sound came in circles above me, tailfeathers vibrating with the air as he plunged in a courtship dance. Then it was the redwing blackbirds song. The first trill brought to mind the bright orange shoulders, the surety of black. Below that, beside me, the sound of rushing water. I smiled. It is spring: late May or early June.

Eyes still closed, I pulled in the scents and felt the aliveness in my mind, wondering if my brain lights the way my dogs' brains do as they spend what seems a very long time at each scent we meet on our walks. Grass. But not lawn, not mown. Sweet. Not unlike a tilled garden. The smell of open soil. A smell I can almost taste.

Then, wet dog. Now I am sure it is spring. Autumn grass carries a scent of discomposure. Summer air is, at least lately, tinged or heavy with smoke, and heat has its own smell. This is fresh. Not fresh like the unsmell of winter, but fresh like the smell of aspen leaves. Cold water. Spruce tips.

My bare legs are warm but not hot.

When I touch it, the ground touches back with shoots of grass soft as the hair on my dog's ears: I stroke the grass and open my eyes. Blue.

Blue the color of forgiveness. Amnesty blue. Hope blue. And a handful of shouldered clouds moving across the horizon. At first, they are in the shape of a comma, then stretch like a trout. The fish cloud swims across the horizon just beneath the sun. The eastern horizon. It is evening. I turn my head to a bush beneath which my dogs lie and see the tight leaves have begun to open like fingers from a fist. There is snow on the peaks. And beside me, a stream filled to the banks and moving fast. Companionable but busy on its way to somewhere else, a kind neighbor saying hello before rushing off to work.

I sit up, and the dogs rise and stretch. The peak before me is granite-topped—all shades of gray and dashes of snow. I have learned this mountainscape as a whole. I find one mountain that I am sure of and then, moving along the horizon, can name many others. But this peak is distant, indistinguishable, a bit of a loner. I don't know it.

I rise and turn around. Here is a peak I recognize. From the front and back to the highest rock and tallest whitebark, I know this mountain. This is Pikeminnow Peak. I am in Pikeminnow

Meadows. Beside me is the North Fork of the Payette in its beginnings as a stream, there is Burgdorf Summit, and this is West Central Idaho. The Payette National Forest. I am only a few miles from home. In this way, I have come to know place, to make my own map.

Two years ago, from atop Pikeminnow Peak, the same test.

Sound and smell and feel. Then sight; blue again, but when I sat up, I saw the meadow below. It lay in the valley like a tapestry. Colored green mostly, browns, too—patches of white in the shade, and through it all the thick thread of water. I would know this meadow if only by the stream. Stretched out, the North Fork of the Payette would be twenty miles long. But as it runs through this two-mile meadow, it weaves and meanders, taking its time through the grass and brush, ribboning tight ess's, so close in places that the stream nearly kisses itself. It is the ribbon through a tapestry I continue to weave in my mind.

After descending the peak that spring afternoon two years ago, my partner, Caleb, our two dogs and I, slipped our canoe into the cold water of the North Fork of the Payette and began our paddle upstream. When we reached the top of the meadow, we turned the boat around and let the current pull us back.

Paddles resting on our knees, the dogs keening over the sides, we all let our gaze dance the landscape around us.

Mine landed on three young mule deer.

They were playing tag a couple hundred yards in front of us. Leaps and false charges. Chases and pounces through the water. Now, two years later, I look for those deer, and though I don't find them on the landscape, I can put them there with memory—a gift this open space affords.

I have other memories here as well. Stories. Like the first time I saw the peak and these meadows. Memories now a decade old from when my partner first introduced me to the area. I was already dumb for the place.

Something like a dream I had had was this Salmon River Country. Trees whose mere whisper of their name brought more trees. Birds whose songs became the voices of friends. The soul-awakening howl of wolves. Flowers with names like monkey and chatterbox and paintbrush. Snows deep as young aspen and larch striking like a match to the autumn light. And mountains. Mountains so numerous and swift I thought I might never know their names, let alone know their skins. And then I did. I hiked their ridges and peaks. I learned their names. That afternoon ten years ago, I learned the name of the mountain I was on. Squaw Peak. Below me Squaw Meadows. I slumped a little when Caleb told me. I said, "I will not call them that." So, in our geographical lexicon, on our maps, they became Pikeminnow Peak. Pikeminnow Meadow.

Pikeminnow Meadows was, like all this area, once unowned. It was, in a sense, public land, but that public had no government managing it. Stories here belong to the Nimiipuu, the Shoshone Bannock, and possibly the Shoshone Paiute. The Tukadeka, or Sheepeater, no doubt wandered through. When six or more feet can blanket the meadow in the winter, only the animal beings'

tracks ribboned the surface. What first name the peak or this meadow had is unknown to me, possibly unbeknownst to anyone, kept within the mountain and water itself.

When I asked locals why it had not been changed, the reply was typical, "It's always been Squaw Peak." Of course, that is not true, but the locals assured me that no one saw it as a pejorative; it wasn't an offense. Squaw just meant Indian woman, didn't it? Following my questions, there were, of course, the sighs and under-the-breath comments about political correctness. McCall and the population of this west-central Idaho region are white.

After rising, last night, I took a walk west toward the mountain where the Northfork is born. For most of the walk, I was barefoot. Foot falling in loam, warm water rushing to my ankles. I came to a sign nearly submerged as if it were being eaten by the grass and soil. It was a property boundary. Below it, a survey marker. I touched it with my toe, stood on it to see if my weight might push it all the way into the earth, but it held. Desperate still to make its claim.

Pikeminnow Meadow was, thirty years ago, privately owned. I looked east to where I imagine a homestead was, then to a falling in fence. I imagined the landscape peppered with fat cattle, the banks of the spring stream collapsing under their weight as they drank the snowmelt. Cows and house are gone. In 2006, the USFS acquired it in a land trade, and now it connects to a larger portion of the Payette National Forest. Added on like lace to a dress.

Beyond the marker, we could have crossed into an older part of the forest, a wilder area thick with pine and granite, but we stopped here. I was shoeless and happy enough just walking the meadow. Summer will pull me into those trees, but spring, in all its ephemerality, begs this carefree barefoot and sundress frolic. I spin for the joy of it, the white of my skirt lifting and for a moment, see myself as simply another flower.

Several years ago, after five days in the Frank Church Wilderness, my partner and I returned to where we'd begun our hike. We drank a semi-warm beer, washed our legs in Big Creek, and climbed in our truck to head home. As usual for me, I reached to flip the visor down and use the mirror on the other side. But before my fingers touched the rim, I stayed my hand. I couldn't look.

For nearly a week, my partner and I had been the only human beings we saw. Occasionally, when I bathed or pumped water, I caught my visage, distorted by ripples and reflecting sky, trees, clouds, and mountains; a collage. I thought of my ancestors and the people who lived here thousands of years before others brought foreign names and survey markers and cattle. And mirrors. Before printed maps. Before media and photographs, before ads telling us how we should look and what beauty was, we were reflected in and with nature. We recognized the self as part of a community that included plants and other animal beings. Indigenous languages evolved through place. Anthropomorphication did not describe plants through human traits; it was the only way to describe human beings through the characteristics of the other beings, the plants, and animals around us. We were not separate from the beauty or severity of the

landscape. That five days allowed me a glimpse. There, in the backcountry, I had lost all need to know myself as a middle-aged mixed-race woman. As I did in the meadow, I could imagine that from a distance, to a circling snipe, I was merely another alder.

Returning to public, pulling down that mirror, I would return to labels. Names. I would have to be the woman my partner's friend once called a sexy squaw, the person the sheriff of Idaho County looked at and said, "I know all the Indians in my county. Why don't I know you?" I would return to a society that judged my weight, skin, and looks before ever hearing my voice. When I looked around my community, instead of seeing blue mountains, soft pine, laughing monkeyflower, graceful elk, and sleek trout, I would see pictures of others I was expected to or assumed myself to look like. Even when I revisited maps, looking for places I knew, I would see Savage Creek, Dead Indian Flat, Squaw Peak, Squaw Meadow.

In Northern Idaho, the Coeur d'Alene tribe successfully had "squaw" removed from eight place names, three on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation and five outside the reservation but in the tribe's ancestral territory. We have seen the dissolution of the name across the west. From Phoenix (Squaw Peak now Piestewa Peak, after fall Native soldier Lori Piestewa) to Lake Tahoe (Squaw Valley, who will announce the "new" name of the area any day.) The Puget Sound is called the Salish Sea, even if informally. The Puyallup Tribe is launching a new effort to rename Mount Rainier and give it back its original name — Mount Tacoma, or Mount Tahoma. In the Native language Twulshootseed, the mountain is called təqʷuʔməʔ — pronounced "Tacoma." We are re-storying maps so that looking at them, we might see something of a more profound history, something representative of the people who first knew them.

Naming is, no doubt, a powerful way of knowing. The naming of landscape features, rivers, meadows, and mountains helps us make internal maps. The naming of birds and flowers, of brushes and insects, shows a kind of intimacy with the being; it allows us to create almanacs of the seasons and locate ourselves in them. Naming is also an affirmation. It is an acknowledgment of existence different from other lives. It makes the strange familiar, which, in turn, creates empathy. To name is to pay attention.

My grandfather named me. My parents wanted to call me Tina. Tina Marie. But Grandpa said, " She is no Tina." Would I have been a different person had that name held? Who have I become with this other moniker? What if I had named myself? What would happen to those moments of questioned identity if I kept for myself a secret name? What could happen if we knew the original names of places and saw ourselves, our entire community, reflected on maps and signs as part of the beautiful collage? If, when I finally exposed the mirror, I saw myself as part of the beautiful tapestry.

There are names on this forest I look forward to saying. Salmon River. Goose Creek. Snowslide. Maki. Golden. Crystal. Hard Butte. Grassy Twin. There are others that I find misnomers, but only because they deny beauty, withhold a certain amount of dignity from a place. Disappointment Lake. Hazard Creek. Box Lake. East fork of Lake Fork. When I asked a friend recently about how things were up Nasty Creek, he said, "Still nasty."

Nevertheless, when I look at these places and think Crystal Mountain, Grassy Twin, Snake River—I create a picture in my mind. I know these mountains by their skins and these rivers by

the taste of their water. I know the lakes by the incredible difficulty it takes to reach them. But when I looked at the peak and the meadow whose name I found, I could no longer think, let alone say, I saw something else.

Something that had nothing to do with a mountain or a meadow.

I felt a pain. A reminder. It stirred fear.

Like when the word was spoken in the movies. Despite what some may think "squaw" means, it has taken on a specific connotation. It is in the way the face changes in the speaker. It is the difference in movies when a cowboy says an Indian Maiden versus Squaw. Or the way a white woman in the movie, *The Help*, says the word when she yells, "And for heaven sakes, don't sit like some squaw Indian! Cross your ankles!"

If we look to maps to find ourselves are we finding antiquated biases and fear? Are we, as Native women, being shown the expectation of who we are? Reflections of our mirrorless grandmothers? As we look to maps for guidance, are they taking us backward toward a future that shows us who we can be?

I think of Robin Wall Kimmerer and a passage from *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses.* "The names we use for rocks and other beings depends on our perspective, whether we are speaking from the inside or the outside of the circle. The name on our lips reveals the knowledge we have of each other, hence the sweet secret names we have for the ones we love. The names we give ourselves are a powerful form of self-determination, of declaring ourselves sovereign territory."

What does the mountain call itself? What does it call the meadow? When I lie on its peak, when I lie next to the creek, I am listening. And smelling and touching and looking. Never, once have I played the game and opened my eyes to wonder *who* I am.

In the winter, this peak and the meadow will become featureless. Where before I was able to see the trail up to the summit, I see only white. The gray crags and granite boulders are covered as well. The stream in the meadow goes silent under as much as seventy inches of snow, and the redwing blackbird and the snipe song are the music of another landscape. It is a rug of white, an open page of a book whose stories lie beneath and just on the next page.

I once sat for hours watching two women weaving blankets on window-sized looms in a small room in the New Mexican town of Chimayo. Thread by thread, the blanket grew, and a picture began to appear. Layers of green and then a bold line of blue. Red. Just like the meadow and the peak as the snow melts. They talked as they wove; these women did. So, I imagine their stories went into the blankets as well.

When finally I had the nerve to interrupt, I asked them if they ever made a mistake? Did they ever add a color that just didn't fit or undo part of their work so they might go back and make the middle blend with the latter? Did they ever sit back and look at the blanket and realize something wasn't right?

The older woman reached to a thread of white that ran through the bottom third of her art. She found its end and pulled gently. I watched it recede as running water might. Then, just as quickly, she added a new color. And like that, the work was complete.

In 2103 I took the first steps in petitioning the USGS to change the name. When I asked for help, the local ranger at the forest service office offered none.

Not because I find myself unattractive, or I was worried my face had gotten too much sun, or a patch of acne had cropped up, but because I would see my *self*. The self others see and the self I present to them. Also, the self that worried what others saw.

I maybe a glimpse of reflection in the river where I swam, but no precise me. After a couple of days, the thoughts of who I was supposed to be and what I represented left me. Wild places can do that. That's why we need them. As Stegner says of Wilderness, if nothing else but to go to the edge and look in.

Unbothered by what I thought I had to be and who I was, I began to feel something keener. A sense of belonging and beauty. There was no judgment here. No expectation. My identity became one with what I was seeing. Trees. Water. Elk. Wildflowers. Mountains. Sky.