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EVENT GUIDE



A LIVE CULTURE CONVERGENCE

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RE-ARRIVAL

Twenty-four years later, curiosity lures me back to the hollow in the Baraboo Hills. I vaguely remember its location and little is recognizable. A meandering rubble-bedded stream gurgles through the ravine and where it pools, it mirrors the sky. But where are the wispy groves of hemlock that bow over the stream? Where are the birches with golden peeling bark glowing against the blue-green hue of the 80-foot-high moss- and fern-covered walls? Downed trees block passage through the gorge now exposed to sunlight and heat the hemlocks can't tolerate. Beginning in the late 1980s, flooding rains combined with high winds often swept through these hills.

But in May 1987, delicious cool air greeted me as I hiked the steep slope down into the shady, damp hollow. The light captured and held in this space had a magical quality. In those years I lived in Madison, Wisconsin, most weekends would find me out photographing Nature Conservancy lands, many in the Baraboo Hills, using vintage film cameras, or printing in the darkroom. These landscapes drew me in, providing weekend respite from the workday challenges of launching the Wisconsin Arts Board's new public art program.

Landscape photography was so out-of-fashion in the art world that I had few mentors or peers, so my work was mostly solitary—my main collaborators, the landscapes I wandered through. Aligning my breathing with my gait freed my thoughts to drift and settle in unexpected places; experiencing these landscapes became a creative exchange. But the compositions in my camera's viewfinder confounded me. What did I hope to communicate with my photographs

—what was the point? I sensed forces underway that were going to yield some insights. How could I show them and what would they mean?

To honor the complex beauty and understand the dynamics of the landscapes in front of my camera, I went on to study ecology, geology, and plant communities. I talked with scientists and land managers. I learned that glaciers bumped up against these hills composed of quartzite around 15,000 years ago and when the ice melted, torrents of water scoured out narrow valleys. The dramatic hollows and draws with outcrops of quartzite and sandstone are the result

of wind and water erosion. Because of the topography and soils, there are micro-climates where unique and rare plants grow.

Since the 1980s, I have photographed other landscapes throughout the Upper Midwest – big woods forests, oak savannas, floodplain forests – even the recovery of a boreal forest after a catastrophic fire. During repeated visits over many seasons and years, certain plants, trees, and landforms became close friends.

Observing these landscapes, I developed the sense we sometimes have when things are about to change—not



Hollow in the Baraboo Hills, 1987, Regina M Flanagan. (To protect this delicate landscape, exact location not revealed)

unlike perceiving how the barometric pressure drops as a stormfront approaches, before it rains—that is equal parts foreboding and hope.

Rebecca Solnit writes in her essay “Respectfully,” that paying attention is the beginning of respect. Knowing the stories of rocks, soils, plants, wildlife, seasons, and weather and understanding the patterns and sequences of a place all reveal that something deep, complex, and alive is happening there. I acutely feel the risk posed by having acquired this knowledge and intimacy with these landscapes; their stories have become entwined with my life.

The hemlocks and golden birches may, or may not, return. Weather disturbances caused by global climate change continue and will likely worsen. Present restoration efforts by scientists involve transitioning this landscape to the red oak plant community because it can adapt to the warming climate as the hemlocks cannot. While I remain haunted by what no longer exists whenever I visit the hollow, the magic of the place is slowly returning for me, and a small hope grows. Transition is definitely underway but also possibly, recovery.

Regina M Flanagan is a photographer, landscape architect and writer living in Saint Paul, MN. She is completing a short documentary film about the Helen Allison Savanna located north of the Twin Cities that she has photographed for over 30 years. To view her photography, visit: reginaflanagan.photography.

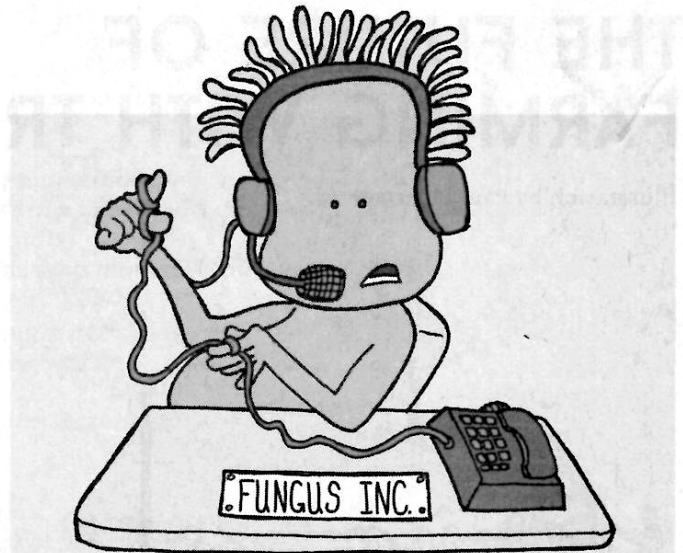




Illustration by Madigan Burke

UNDERGROUND FUNGAL NETWORKS

Plant roots and fungi form symbiotic relationships. The fungi help trees or shrubs, and in return, the roots give the fungi carbon, carbohydrates, and other nutrients. The symbiotic relationship between fungi and plant roots is called a mycorrhiza.



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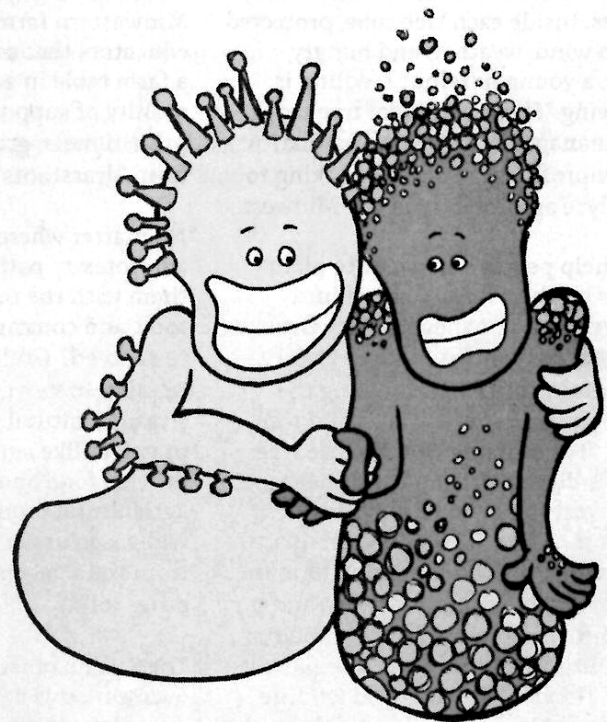


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