

# **A Song for the Asking**

## ***The Electronic Newsletter of EarthSong Photography***

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### **Hello to All**

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“(Man) must make, by way of his cultural world, an actual conscious reentry into the sunflower forest he had thought to merely exploit or abandon. He must do this in order to survive.”

Loren Eiseley  
The Invisible Pyramid

Fifty-feet off the edge of the deck on which I sit there is a small cluster of silver maples, perhaps half-a-dozen trees, the tallest of which are somewhere in the neighborhood of 30' in height; not quite half of the stature they may expect to ultimately achieve. The tiny reddish buds of new life are already prominent on the otherwise bare, slender gray branches. In another month, or so, their growth will have effloresced to reveal the crowded clusters of greenish-yellow blossoms – male and female in separate clusters – that will eventually mature in April into the light-brown, long-lobed samaras – the winged seeds that will launch themselves on an earthbound and windborne journey, carrying with them every bit of nourishment and information needed to become the next generation of silver maples. But today they remain what they are in this moment: tiny red bits of hope and promise, a reminder of the power of a flower. And there is much more here besides, for as I sit watching this miracle of incipience, a swirling flock of cedar waxwings, one of the largest I have



ever seen swoops into the tops of the tallest maples in a maneuver of aviation daring-do that would take the breath away from even the most jaded member of the Blue Angels. There are easily seventy-five birds, now all perched among the cranberry and heather hues and chattering lively.

They are a gregarious lot. I am drawn to waxwings as a species, perhaps, I think, because I commonly encounter small groups of them foraging in the boreal forests of the Smokies crest above 6,000'; and I figure that they must be sturdy songsters, as, say, are chickadees, for they always seem happy and contented with their nomadic lives. Here they are in a suburban valley, excited to have found the budding silver maples to reward their efforts. Although the cedar waxwing's



summer breeding range extends far up into the Canadian north, yet barely covers, at its southern end, the Appalachians of my home, their migratory, winter territory spreads out, even into the upper corner of Columbia and Venezuela in South America.

To use the term "frugivorous" when

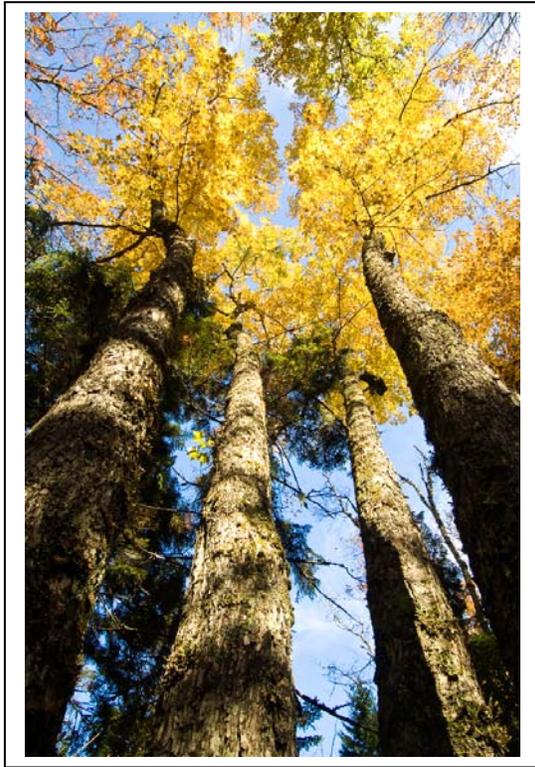
speaking of the cedar waxwing is almost to indulge in understatement, for there are few species in the bird world whose lives are so completely shaped around its dependence on fruit, and certainly the waxwing's migratory and breeding habits are fully informed by that connection, as is much of the daily ebb and flow of its wandering existence.

The next time you encounter it in a Trivial Pursuit showdown, here's the answer: The name "waxwing" comes from the waxy red appendages found on the tips of the secondaries (the middle group of flight feathers on a bird's outstretched wing) of



some individuals. The exact function of these appendages is not known; however, they occur in breeding plumage adults and so may have some signaling function in mate selection.

The world of nature excites me beyond words. I love its paradoxical simplicity in complexity; I love its diversity and multiplicity. Accidents in nature are either rewarded with continuity or purged from existence; and try as he may to remove himself from it, or to climb above the all-encompassing guidelines nature sets for all its creations, mankind, in the end, is merely one more of those creations and subject to the same constraints as the rest; and the advantages that his tools give him is, ultimately, merely illusory in the face of nature's dictates. I cannot entertain these trains of thought without being reminded of the man from whom I first learned to consider the interface of science, nature and awe; whose own life was a reflection of his connections with the natural world: a scientist who wrote and spoke so movingly of the dry stuff of anthropology and geology that his words continue to be referred to as "mystical", whose name is still evoked for the sense of wonder and magic he brought to the substance of his inquiry.



As with many of the spirit-filled threads of learning I would ultimately weave into the tapestry of my own belief, the arbiters of my formal education would never have deigned to expose me to **Loren Eiseley**. It would remain for me to discover him, and them, on my own, or with the help of others whose natures ran somewhat counter to the norm. And, thus it was that I encountered him on the shelves of my favorite



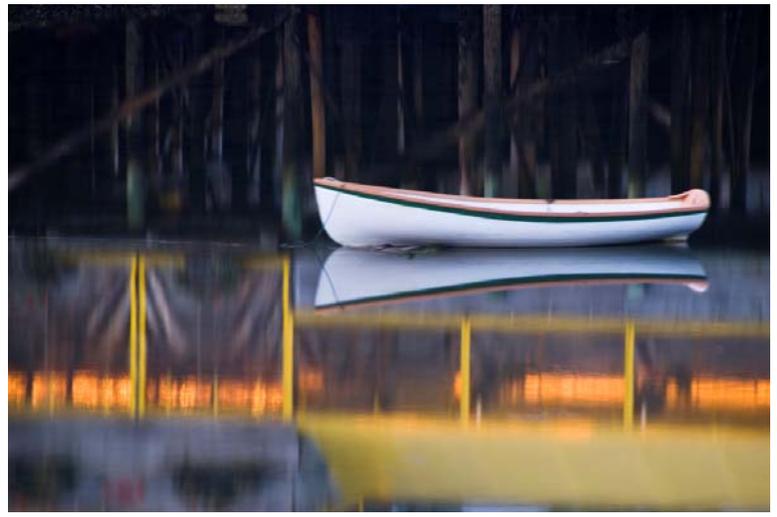
old bookstore from undergraduate days in Athens, the **Hobbit Habit**, one of those many delightful, independent repositories of literacy whose demise can be traced to the Wal-Martization of American business. The book that first attracted me was a small volume, whose categorization on the

back cover simply said "nature." The title seemed interesting enough, "**The**

**Immense Journey**”, but it was the sub-title that really grabbed my attention: ...**“An Imaginative Naturalist Explores the Mysteries of Man and Nature.”** I was not disappointed then, nor have I been since, with the musings of this gifted and sensitive man. “...**Journey**...” had been published only a decade before my 1967 discovery of it, but it was during the early years of that era of rapid change that still grips our world, and I remember asking myself, “How valid can this information be that was set down ten years ago?” Today a, hopefully, wiser me would phrase it somewhat differently: “Much knowledge is timeless, can this fit into that mould?”

It was a collection of essays that matched a scientist’s careful logic with the visionary keening of a shaman; stories filled with an all-encompassing grasp of the processes of the natural world and man’s wanderings through that world.

There was one among them, in particular, whose premise shocked my understanding and changed my perception of natural history forever; and whenever I see cedar waxwings acting out their frugivorous natures, it is this essay that immediately comes to mind, **“How Flowers Changed the World.”** For flowers, you see, did not always exist in parallel with the history of our currently life-nourishing planet. This is a fact not to be dismissed or taken lightly.



Reflect on this carefully, if you will: plants that flower, that reproduce by means of sexual systems that involve flowers, angiosperms they are called, have not always been present on this Earth; indeed, they are among the newer life forms that we have, and without them the world as we know it –

including humans – would not exist. And this has absolutely nothing to do with a belief, or disbelief, in a universal creative power.

Our little condensed ball of gas, dust, and rock has been around, more or less in

its solid form, for some 4.5 billion years, in a universe that is, itself, more than 10 billion years old; and some form of life – matter having the ability to replicate itself – has been present on that ball for perhaps as long as 3.5-4 billion years. And it is, that something we would recognize as photosynthesis has been occurring for about 3 billion years. This harnessing of the sun's energy by earthbound forms is what allowed the primitive green plants to spread ashore from the tidal shallows and establish themselves on drier land. This startling change can be timed to about 700 million years before the present. All well and good, but thus far life was limited to the margins of the seas and rivers; and most of the inland surface of our lovely blue marble continued to appear as does today the red-hued landscape of Mars. It is only about 132 million years ago that something wholly dramatic and literally life-changing occurred: plants with flowers arose, and our world has never been the same since. Let me try to put it briefly into context: The nimbly-adapted



brain of the warm-blooded creatures, both birds and mammals, requires, for such a level of operation, a high consumption of oxygen and, thus, food whose energy is in a highly concentrated form. Without this, these critters cannot keep up themselves. As Eiseley put it, “It was the rise of flowering plants that provided that energy and changed the face of the living world. Their appearance parallels in a quite surprising manner the rise of the birds and mammals.” Flowers have made possible my pleasure in watching the journey of the cedar waxwings and my disconcertion in seeing the seemingly unending assault on this lovely world by the seemingly insatiable desires of what man has become. Loren Eiseley saw and felt all of this as well, and expressed both so much more eloquently than I could ever hope to do.

Loren Corey Eiseley described himself in these words: “evolutionary biologist,

anthropologist, bone hunter, poet, teacher, hobo, historian, naturalist, philosopher.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* once put him this way, “the heir apparent to **Henry David Thoreau**”. And he was, indeed, all of those and



probably a few other descriptives besides. When Loren Eiseley was born, on September 3, 1907, in Lincoln, almost 30 years to the day from when Tasunke Witko had been murdered at Camp Robinson at the extreme other end of the state, Nebraska was a land that still tested the resolve of those of European

descent who chose to live there. Even in the eastern portion where greater agricultural diversity offered hope for a more secure life, making a living was a challenging proposition. For Loren’s father Clyde, it seemed more of a challenge than for most. Clyde was a

hardware salesman, who was often away from home for extended periods. The family was very poor, and living at the edge of town seemed to isolate them even more; but Clyde Eiseley was a lover of words and an amateur Shakespearean actor, who imparted to his son the gift of colorful language. Daisey Corey Eiseley, Loren’s



mother, was described as beautiful and as an “untaught prairie artist.” She had been deaf since childhood; and, perhaps, it was this circumstance of being locked in the inner world of her own incommunicable thoughts that was, if not the source of, at least a contributing factor to, the irrational and destructive behavior for which she was known. She communicated with her son by thumping on the floor.

The marriage of his father and mother was not a pleasant one, and it seems to have resulted, in Loren, in a child who felt alienated and alone, and who spent, early on, a great deal of time by himself, wandering the plains and creek bottoms beyond his door. It was Clyde’s second marriage, his first wife having died several

years earlier.

Sometimes our best teachers, and those whose impact on us is of the greatest significance, come from unexpected places. Fortunately for us, in Loren's life there were such teachers: his half-brother Leo, son of his father's earlier marriage, gave him a copy of *Robinson Crusoe* and with it he taught himself to read. His aunt and uncle who lived nearby opened their home to him and helped with his finances as they could. Uncle Buck also took Loren to Lincoln's natural history museum, Morrill Hall, where his affinity for fossils was quickly established. This initial attraction would become a part of his life's work from

which he never deviated, although the early path by which he pursued it was often circuitous and occasionally interrupted. His home situation, exacerbated by the death of his father, led him to drop out of high school and to support himself with servile jobs.



Ultimately he

enrolled in the University of Nebraska where he began writing for its literary publication, the *Prairie Schooner*. He also began going on archaeological digs with the Museum and made several trips to the western part of the state and to the Southwest for that purpose. Ill fortune was not quite ready to loosen its grip, however: he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, and determined that an extended stay in the drier climes of the West was necessary for his health. The restlessness that had been a part of his nature also asserted itself, and he spent a year as an itinerant drifter during another time of severe economic downturn in our country when so many others were forced into a similar lifestyle.

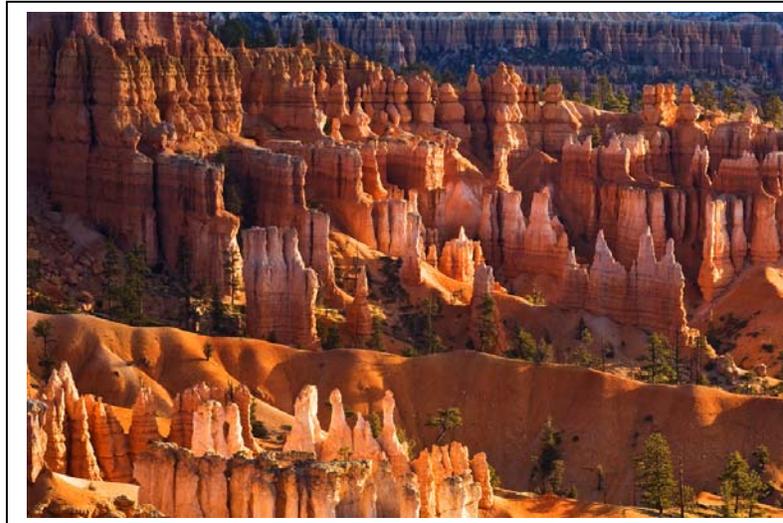
Finally, in 1933, at age 26, Eiseley was awarded his Bachelor of Science Degree in English and Geology/Anthropology. By now he had become settled in his academic pursuits and determined to obtain his Masters and PhD, which he did in Anthropology, both at the University of Pennsylvania, the latter in 1937. That same year he gained a teaching position at the University of Kansas. In 1944 he left Kansas to become head of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Oberlin College, having married Mabel Langden in 1939; and in 1946 he returned to the University of Pennsylvania where, he would remain until his death in 1977 except for a year's fellowship at Stanford. During the years 1959-1961 he served as Provost at Penn, and in 1961 the university created a special interdisciplinary chairmanship for him, which was later named the **Benjamin Franklin**

Professorship. At the time of his death, Loren Eiseley had received thirty-six honorary degrees during a twenty-year period. He was the most honored member of the University of Pennsylvania since Ben Franklin had been there in the latter decades of the eighteenth century.

I am always interested in the dry recitation of a person's academic accomplishments, for they may, or may not, give the full measure of the person who has gained them. In Loren Eiseley's case, they don't even begin to come close.

Where I grew up the scientists I knew were a practical lot; good folks, but eminently practical, which is not to disparage practicality in the least, rather merely to say that it did not seem to suit my nature completely. Try as I might to remain wholly of a practical mind in all things, I simply could not pull it off. Life was so full of feeling and sensation – heart, if you will – that I could not ignore their pull on me indefinitely. The intricacies of living were a mystery that begged for a solution that could not be found through practicality alone, and the more I tried to make it be that way, the less satisfied with it I became.

Had I met Loren Eiseley at an earlier age, I might have become a scientist; as it was, he became one of my greatest hidden teachers. He, himself, well-understood this notion and had written about it in 1963 in an essay that was published first in the collection entitled **The Unexpected Universe** and later



in one of my favorite assemblages, **The Star Thrower**, a post-humorous volume that is part nature essay, part autobiography, and part exploration of the interface between science and humanism. In fact, the essay is titled simply, **The Hidden Teacher**. In it he muses down the long hallways of the evolution of life on

earth and outward into the infinities of time, and explores our own infinitesimal place in this grand design; but what is so instructive is the way he goes about it in

telling the stories of some of the hidden teachers in his own life, and the so often obscure ways in which their teachings are delivered and the impacts that they have: the orb spider, encountered at the head of an arroyo on a fossil hunting expedition, that years later arose in his memory to offer an insight into mankind's presence in the universe; the experience of a young man, who became one of Loren's own teachers, that changed his life's path, and thus, ultimately, Loren's as well.



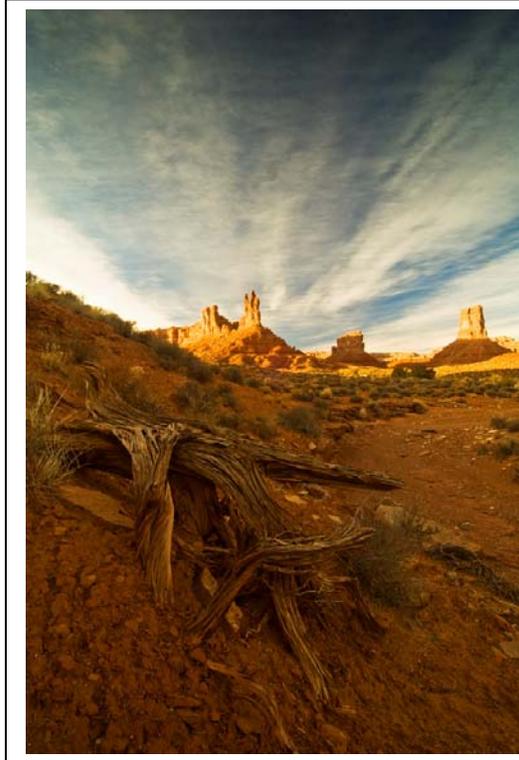
Eiseley's larger question presented in *The Hidden Teacher* has to do with which lessons mankind will take away from his encounters with those obscure instructors and what, in consequence, he will, as a species, become:

"We are too content with our sensory extensions, with the fulfillment of that Ice Age mind that began its journey amidst the cold of vast tundras and that pauses only briefly before it leaps into space. It is no longer enough to see as a man sees – even to the ends of the universe. It is not enough to hold nuclear energy in one's hand like a spear, as a man would hold it, or to see the lightning, or times past, or time to come, as a man would see it. If we continue to do this, the great brain – the human brain – will be only a new version of the old trap, and nature is full of traps for the beast that cannot learn.

"It is not sufficient any longer to listen at the end of a wire to the rustlings of galaxies; it is not enough even to examine the great coil of DNA in which is coded the very alphabet of life. These are our extended perceptions. But beyond lies the great darkness of the ultimate Dreamer, who dreamed the light and the galaxies. Before act was, or substance existed, imagination grew in the dark. Man partakes of that ultimate wonder and creativeness. As we turn from the galaxies to the swarming cells of our own being, which toil for something, some entity beyond their grasp, let us remember man, the self-fabricator who came across an ice age to look into the mirrors and the magic of science. Surely he did not come to see himself or his wild visage only. He came because he is at heart a listener and a searcher for some transcendent realm beyond himself. This he has worshipped by many names, even in the dismal caves of his beginning. Man, the self-fabricator, is so by reason of gifts he had no part in devising – and so he searches as the single living cell in the beginning must have sought the ghostly creature it was to serve."

Though I completely agree with Eiseley's cant, I have come away from all of my readings of this essay with a somewhat different slant, perhaps because I have chosen to draw sharp focus in another place. For me, in this instant, it comes

down to the individual. As I see it, we are, all of us, both teacher and student all of the time. We are always learning and teaching; sometimes one, sometimes the



other, but often both simultaneously. And sometimes it is hard to know the things we are sharing with others, or the impacts those things are having. Sometimes it is only years later that the outcome – for good or ill – is felt and recognized. What we teach and what we learn are part of a complex dance that humans have devised over the thousands, probably hundreds of thousands of years since we began inquiring of one another and seeking to make our thoughts and desires known to each other. It is probable that from the moment we first realized that we possess emotions, we understood the power of our communication to hurt as well as to heal; and as our symbols became more and more refined into those puffs of air we call words, we have seen a sharp uptake in the concentration of that power that allows us to project ourselves across the spaces that exist between us as

individual beings. Perhaps, one day, our evolution will carry us through those spaces with a more complete awareness of, and a greater willingness to be guided by, an affinity for all life, indeed, for all non-life as well. And in those moments of clarity and comprehension we will come to truly understand the Oneness that is the web by which all are connected.

## **What's Now?**

As if it weren't enough that we have **Punxsutawney Phil** in Pennsylvania and **General Beauregard**

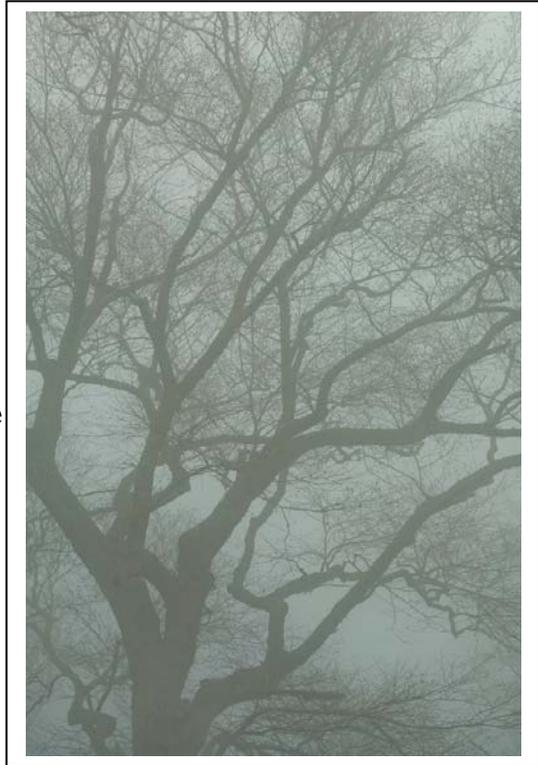
**Lee** in Georgia battling it out over which of the subterranean critters can predict more accurately the vagaries of winter's end, it was reported on that mid-hibernal day that there are no fewer than five marmot prognosticators across the country claiming the mantle of the "Great Groundhog." So what this



portends for conclusion of the cold season seems to be anyone's guesstimate.

As for me, it doesn't much matter. Beauty is beauty year-round, and this time of year holds just as much allure for me as the wonders of spring that I anticipate being here soon enough. And this Park, these Smoky Mountains never cease to amaze me with the range of their beauty. In the span of a single day this week I found fog-shrouded hardwoods along high ridges, snow-covered boulders in an upland river bed, early spring wildflowers along a mid-elevation trail, wonderful stream images and daffodils blooming in Cades Cove where settlers cabins once stood. What an incredible array of imagery, and in March it will only be more and better.

The great wonder of March to me is that even though the trees are still bare, by the latter part of the month they will have begun to show buds of color. This color becomes the perfect complement to the gnarled trunks and stony ledges which remain quite visible until the leaves are actually out sometime in April. The light in March can be spectacular, especially



when seen in combination with early morning fogs and mists, which are common because of the extended temperature range that occurs. Days are warmer, but nights remain fairly cool and when nights are calm and relatively free of wind, fog can readily form. It's hard to decide whether to be up high along the ridges looking down into the fog-filled valleys, or down low, somewhere like Cades Cove where the trees are shrouded in mystery. Either location is sure to be rewarding, even when the ridges themselves are socked in, as they were earlier this week. For the month of March, Clingman's Dome Road is typically closed, so the parking lot at the Dome is not available for sunrise or sunset. This means that Luftee Overlook is the only viable place to shoot dawn's early light. Fortunately, the sun comes up on a perfect azimuth for Luftee for

the entire month, and fog in the valley of Beech Flats Prong is just gravy to be enjoyed.

Remember that the Daylight Savings Time change now takes place in March, so that, for the first week, sunrise times in the Park will be from 7:02a.m.-6:54 a.m.; but after that, times will vary from 7:53a.m.-7:20a.m. on the last day of the

month. With Clingman's Dome not a viable sunset location, the only real choice is Morton Overlook; but unfortunately, at the beginning of the month, the sun will still be setting too far to the left and behind Sugarland Mountain to provide a very good opportunity. By the latter part of the month sunset will be more behind the Chimney



Tops and thus will allow for a more interesting and graphic position in which to place the sun in an image. An alternative for sunset is to travel the short distance from the Park over to the Blue Ridge Parkway and shoot sunset from Bunches Bald Overlook at Mile Marker 459.5, or Lickstone Ridge Overlook at MM 459.



Water levels in the Park's streams are lower than you would expect for this time of year, since we are right in the middle of the wet season; but there has been good precipitation throughout the winter, so the levels are at least being maintained and not lowering further. There are some wonderful

stream images to be found throughout the Park, especially along Little River, the West Prong of Little Pigeon watershed, the Middle Prong of Little watershed all the way to Tremont, and the Middle Prong of Little Pigeon watershed in Greenbrier. There are exposed rock formations, new cascade configurations, and new quiet pools to be photographed. It has always seemed to me that the water in winter is clearer than during the warmer months, and with the levels lower, it sometimes seems that I am looking through clear glass at a rocky world that I have never been able to see before. It is truly fascinating.

The last week in February is traditionally when I visit Cove Hardwood Nature

Trail at Chimneys Picnic Area to check on the coming of the first flowers. Usually there are a few hepatica buds (*Hepatica nobilis* var. *acuta*) showing; last year there was actually an open flower on February 26. This year, on the same day, there was a cluster of open flowers and quite a few on-coming buds as well. This is interesting since, in this part of the mountains, it has been one of the coldest Januarys on record; but what is also accurate is that there have been a number of periods in which the temperatures over several days were significantly higher than usual, apparently enough so that the plant beings decided that the end of winter was imminent and that they, therefore, needed to respond in



their proper fashion by getting ready to bloom. What I found when I reached Cades Cove was a bloom of daffodils (*Narcissi*) much more extensive than I would have expected for this point in the season; and while there are plenty of buds yet to open, there are more flowers than I have ever seen at this time of year. I would not expect to see this many for another 10 days, or so. If we get a substantial March snowfall (and there is snow forecast for tomorrow in Western North Carolina) in the cove, the contrasting elements will make for some interesting images. It will take a significant freeze to actually kill the blooms, but they will withstand the snow fairly well. Either way, the daffodils are blooming, so be aware of them.

Within the next two to three weeks I suspect that some of the early bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) will appear around Oconaluftee Visitor Center and trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*) will be found along the Little River Trail above Elkmont Campground. In some of the lower reaches of its range, say below Chimneys Picnic Area, fringed phacelia (*Phacelia fimbriata*) will likely be found in bloom, and along Cooper Road Trail in Cades Cove there will probably be some Catesby's trillium (*Trillium catesbaei*) in flower. Back on Cove Hardwood Nature Trail along with the hepatica there should also be some spring beauty (*Claytonia caroliniana*) opened out, as well as several of the violets: early yellow (*Viola rotundifolia*), halberd-leaved (*V. hastata*), and woolly blue (*V. sororia*). In addition to all this, there will be trout lilies (*Erythronium umbilicatum*) on display. And if the season stays as far ahead as it seems to be, then before the end of March many of the blooms that traditionally show up in early April may have made their spring appearance. These might include (large) white trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*), the dicentra pair: squirrel corn (*Dicentra canadensis*)

and Dutchman's britches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), sweet white trillium (*Trillium simile*), wood anemone (*Anemone quinquefolia*), rue anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*), wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*), columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), and purple phacelia (*Phacelia bipinnatifida*). There is also an interesting member of the buttercup family, early meadowrue (*Thalictrum dioicum*) that can be found on Roaring



Fork Motor Nature Trail near the Ephraim Bales cabin during March. Its blooms look somewhat like small columbine flowers that never quite finished maturing. As I sit here on this final day of February watching a low overcast scud across the ridge tops, with blooms of sunlight occasionally breaking through to brighten the day, and temperatures in the upper 40's with the promise of more rain and then snowflakes as the degrees drop into the 30's, I am reminded of a quintessential March, where the weather is topsy-turvy and the land seems to be straining one way and then another in anticipation of the explosion of new growth that heralds the vernal equinox at hand. I am reminded of why I truly love the natural world; a world with such an abundance of diversity, a world that never tires of the cycle of change that allows it to continue to proceed on its long journey across the cosmos. I am also reminded of Loren Eiseley and perhaps come a little closer to a more complete understanding of why this place, these Mountains of the Blue Mist, are so intensely special to me. If it is, as someone once said, that they should have called it "Wildflower National Park", and if as Loren once wrote, "...Flowers Changed the World", then to be in the midst of it every day is to live as close to heaven as is humanly possible

### **A Tip is Worth...?**

No, it is not because I am filled with obscure guilt that I step gently over, and not upon, the autumn cricket. It is not because of guilt that I refuse to shoot the last osprey from her nest in the tide marsh. I possess empathy; I have grown with man in his mind's growing. I share that sympathy and compassion which extends beyond the barriers of class and race and form until it partakes of the universal whole. I am not ashamed to profess this emotion, nor will I call it a pathology. Only through this experience many times repeated and enhanced does man become truly human. Only then will his gun arm be forever lowered.

Loren Eiseley  
**The Lost Notebooks**

Perhaps you don't really think of yourself as an artist. Many folks who seem quite serious about their photography would never even consider calling themselves by the name "artist", and yet they are quite serious about learning to take better pictures. So am I, and will be all of my life; and I do, very much, think of myself as a creator of art.

Yet even if your highest ultimate aim is merely to become a better picture taker, there are ideas for you to consider as you move through the process that speak to the artist who, I believe, dwells, hidden or not, in each of us. To desire to take better pictures is to feel the passion that truly lies at the heart of art, the passion



that impels us toward growing beyond where we are.

When I was a boy, baseball was my passion. I wore out several wooden bats using them to hit rocks in my grandfather's field; I carried my glove and a tennis ball everywhere I went, in case I found steps or a barn to throw against to practice fielding; I read all the books I could find on the strategy of the game. I once had a Little League coach who spent hours teaching me all that he knew and then more hours teaching me to coach myself, to see the game as if I were an observer on the sidelines and not just wrapped up in playing my own position. So when I can across a book about coaching myself as an artist, I had a feeling I was in for a treat.

**Eric Maisel**, the author of **Coaching the Artist Within**, is one of this country's foremost creativity coaches. He

has been at the game for many years, and his insights into the creative process are gems of wisdom from which we can all gain. I have carried this book with me for several years, and I'd like to share some of it with you.

There are twelve skills presented as methodology for self-coaching the artist within you. What I plan to do is to take three of those skills and discuss them in each of the next four newsletters, including this one.

The essential initial step – the **first requisite skill** – is the **doing of those things necessary to your becoming your own coach**. While this may seem like it is simple and straightforward, it is probably more complicated than you might imagine. It requires some separation – you from yourself – so that you can clearly see you, clearly observe your own life, your inner shenanigans and your carefully cultivated defenses. This separated observer is someone who will not hesitate to kick you in the seat of your pants when you need it, or to give you a hard time when you try to hide behind your defenses; he/she is also someone who will love you when you need loving and tell you what a good job you're

doing when you're doing a good job: will do all of these things without hesitation and without exception. It is you, for you are both the observed and the observer, and you must go about each of these roles with total and complete seriousness; you must bear impartial witness to the proceedings of your own life, even as you are in the middle of living it; and you, the observer, is simply disinterestedly interested in the "why" of things, just as a way of moving you forward and resolving the obstacles you have placed in your path that keep you from your picture-taking best.

It's perfectly acceptable, in fact it's expected and encouraged, that these two people will talk to each other regularly, for it is from those conversations that growth occurs. There are two requirements for this effort to proceed with integrity: courage and common sense. From courage comes honesty and



from common sense comes the embracing of what is actual and the avoidance of



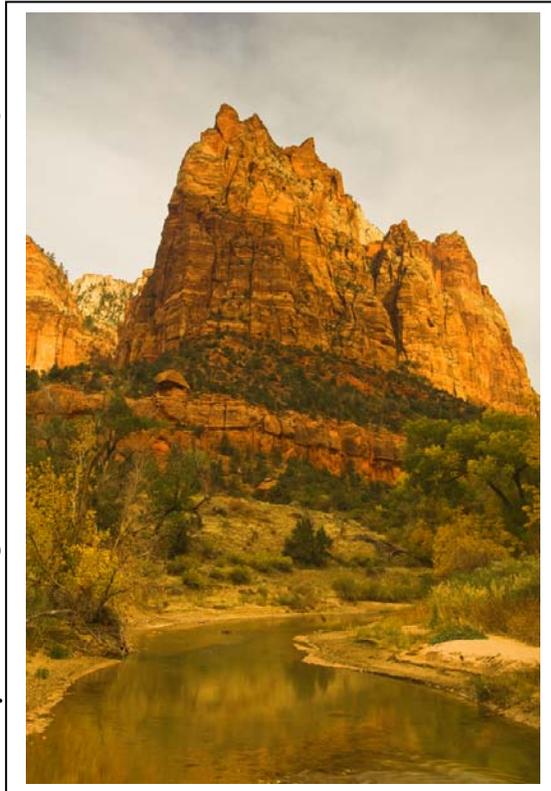
unrealistic expectations. Lacking this capacity to step away from yourself, it is sometimes difficult to see answers, even obvious ones, much less understand the questions that must be asked to move you from where you are to where you want to be.

Rejecting the good guidance of someone else is one thing, but rejecting what could be your own good guidance is, excuse my political incorrectness, dumb; and we're all guilty and we've all been dumb, but it's not a permanent estate. Our resistance to changing this means exposing our cherished defenses and long-held excuses to the light of another opinion, an opinion that says to you, "I love you, but I don't want to hear these same old excuses any more; I love you, let's try something different."

Eric Maisel says this, "Most people never achieve this level of self-awareness, self-communication, and real courage. As a consequence they never become wise about their own motives, methods, and

madnesses. They succumb...soothe themselves...and let decades pass in a trance. This is the common way, the entirely human way, the way that most people live, including those who have the itch to create,” or to take better pictures.

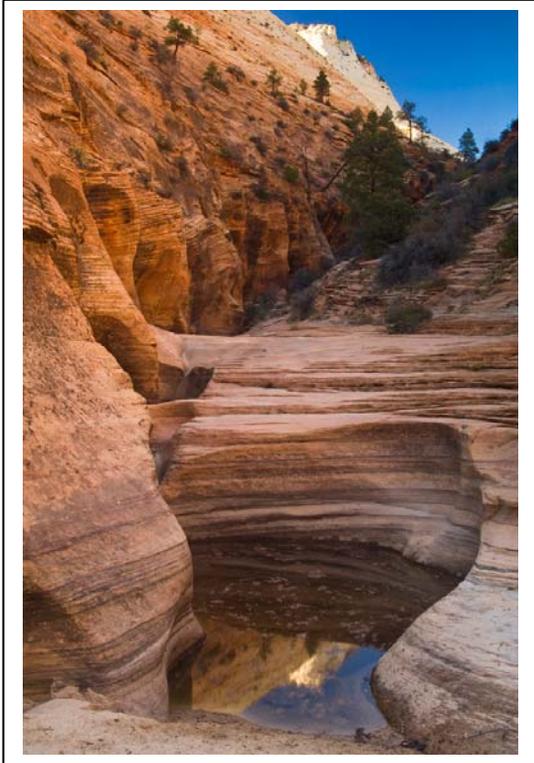
So it comes to this, the first skill is the willingness to become your own coach, to be honest and objective about your situation and then to do whatever your situation requires, including things you don't want to do, to take better pictures. Of the **second skill**, Maisel says that it's really more of a way of life than just a skill. He is talking about the notion of what he calls “**passionately making meaning.**” Keep in mind what he just said about this being more of a way of life, because otherwise you'll be tempted to ask, “What can this possibly have to do with taking better pictures?” And my answer would be, “Everything.” You can't possibly take the best pictures within you if you're not going about life passionately. And even if you are being passionate about your life, it may not have occurred consciously to you what you are doing.



Maisel says it involves five aspects. **First, you decide** to make your life count, **to matter**, to live a principled, active existence, to **live authentically**. **Second**, you hold this intention: “Regardless of whether or not the universe is meaningful, of whether my odds of succeeding are long or short, of everything at both the existential level and at the practical level, I am going to **intentionally make meaning.**” What this amounts to is saying to yourself that you're not going to wait on the universe to announce to you what you should do; you are going to decide, based on your own best understanding to truth and reality, how you will matter. **Third**, you ask yourself **what role (or roles) you intend to play** in this life. Eric Maisel distilled his own thoughts on this into one sentence, “I will make use of myself every day in the service of truth-telling and other important values while at the same time getting some real satisfaction out of life through love and work.” That sounds like a pretty admirable role to me. **Fourth**, you **promise yourself to hold the intention** to fulfill your life purpose. Recently, my grandson, Rich, was visiting with his parents. Now my daughter and son are two of the most wonderful parents on earth, and Rich is the living proof; but somehow they had overlooked something that needed to be corrected. They had never talked to Rich about how to find his rock. So we went through the entire ritual of learning the rules of rock selection and then allowing Rich to find the rock that was his very own. It is the rock by which he will always remember who

he is and how special he is in this world; and even when he doesn't have his rock with him, he will come to remember all of this and to hold to this intention of the role he plays. It is with this simple act, or simple acts like this, that we begin to know who we are and to hold to our knowing regardless of what happens to us. The **fifth**, and final, step in passionately making meaning is **to go about this entire effort with passion and energy**. Passion is the force that motivates us and provides the fuel for our journey into meaning. It is not something to be avoided or feared, in spite of what most of us have been taught about the importance of being in control at all times and reining in our passionate

impulses. Passion should be directed so that it is aimed at creativity, and not expressed so that it is harmful to ourselves or others; but to control that about which we are passionate is to stifle that creative impulse, in life or in taking better pictures. The final skill I want to discuss in this newsletter is the **skill of getting a grip on your mind**. This skill is of vital importance and it addresses the issue of "wrong thinking." Wrong thinking comes in a variety of forms. Maisel mentions self-battering and self-bashing; but he also talks about wrong thinking disguised as "objectivity" which masks our doubts, fears, and anxieties. He points to bravado, stubbornness, and rage; and he says this, "Wrong thinking is a surrender and a defeat and a creativity self-coach's prime enemy." Being a self-coach amounts as much as anything to becoming your own therapist, and in that role you become



truly interested in how you think, what you think, why you think what you think, and what you can do to change your thoughts and thought patterns.

So what do skills like these have to do with being a better picture taker? Well, suppose you are in the habit of saying to yourself, "You know, I've never been very technically inclined, but I have a good eye, so I'll just take my pictures with my camera on automatic settings. After all, the camera manufacturers must know what they're doing when they create these settings, and that's good enough for me."

That sounds fine, but what it overlooks is that cameras set on automatic settings are geared to a single result: The camera's on-board computer is taking in the information regarding the ambient light and is creating an averaging of the various inputs. The result of this averaging is a medium-toned exposure, even if the subject is something other than medium-toned. Now, if you have some type of exposure compensation control, you can do something to override this, but it

still won't give you the accuracy that manual metering will give you; and if you never learn how to meter in manual mode, you have given over to the camera part of the creative control that will allow you to take better pictures. And I could go on from there.

There are innumerable such voices that can suddenly pop up in the middle of your head that, when listened to, will keep you from doing even just basic things that would otherwise make you a better picture taker; so bothering to acquire the skills that will make you an effective self-coach is an investment in better images well worth the effort; moreover, it's an investment in you.

## **As for Walking in Beauty...**

As I Walk with Beauty,  
As I walk, as I walk  
The universe is walking with me  
In beauty it walks before me  
In beauty it walks behind me  
In beauty it walks below me  
In beauty it walks above me  
Beauty is on every side  
As I walk, I walk with beauty

### **Traditional Diné Prayer**

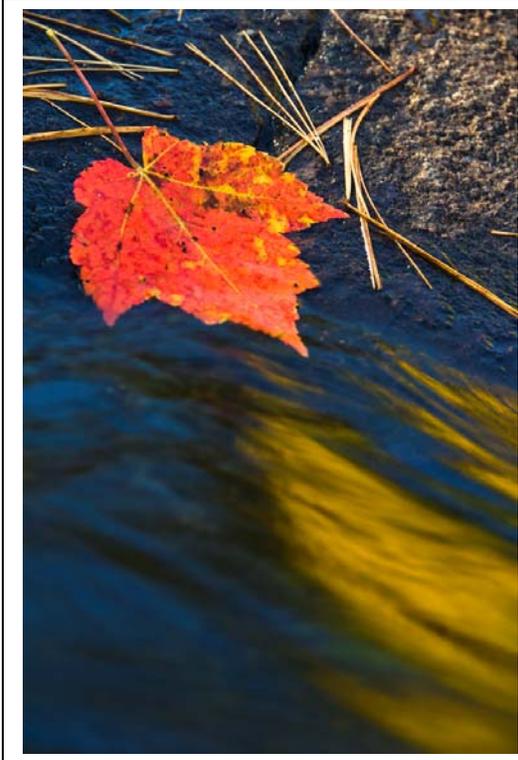
Do not let the fact that things are not made for you, that conditions are not as they should be, stop you. Go on anyway. Everything depends on those who go on anyway.

**Robert Henri**  
*from The Art Spirit*

It's hard to believe that I haven't written a "**Song...**" since September of last year. What an incredible ending 2008 saw. Thanks to all of you who supported the work of **EarthSong Photography and Photography with Heart Workshops** through a wonderful year of traveling, learning, and just plain fun. If you've visited the [Photography with Heart](http://www.PhotographywithHeart.com) site recently, [www.PhotographywithHeartWorkshops.com](http://www.PhotographywithHeartWorkshops.com), you've noticed



that we have a really neat selection of workshop experiences set out for you, ranging from St. Augustine in sunny Florida to Maine's Acadia National Park for spring and the beauty Michigan's Upper Peninsula for fall. You can also find the



[PwH schedule on my website, www.EarthSongPhotography.com.](http://www.EarthSongPhotography.com)

As always, if you have any questions regarding any of the **PwH** events, the very best resource is **Kris Morgan** at [kris@naturaltapestries.com](mailto:kris@naturaltapestries.com). Kris can give all to scoop on motels, travel, fees, and the like, and since she's been to most of these locations, she can give great information on what you'll see and shoot. Of course, I'm always glad to answer any questions I can, so don't hesitate to contact me if there 's something you want to know about our travels.

In addition the these, there are two other workshops I'll be doing with other instructors. This year **Kendall Chiles** and I have decided to do our annual workshop in Acadia in the fall. We'll be working out of Bar Harbor and will be exploring the entire range of the park and surrounding Mount Desert Island. The

dates for this event are October 11-16, 2009 and the tuition is \$995. As is our custom, we will maximize the time we're in the field, while at the same time offering instructive classroom programs and meaningful critique sessions geared toward encouraging your growth as a photographer. Kendall and I were in Acadia last spring and had a

great group for the season of wildflowers and new green; and this fall will be more of the same in the season of color. If you would like to consider joining us or have questions, contact me at

**(828) 788-0687**, or  
At **(828) 235-0974**;

or Kendall at

**(865) 363-1525**. If

you'd rather email me,

the addresses are [don@earthsongphotography.com](mailto:don@earthsongphotography.com), or [mcgowan592@aol.com](mailto:mcgowan592@aol.com).



The other workshop I want to share with you is something entirely new and one about which I'm very excited. Years ago, when I was a very new professional photographer, I was fortunate to have the chance to work in a studio in Knoxville, Tennessee. The photographer in that studio was **Rip Noel**, one of the finest commercial photographers I've ever known and someone who has been a good friend for a long time. Rip has always been quick to embrace emerging technologies, and, in fact, has served as an Adobe© Beta Tester for many years, as their products have entered and evolved in the marketplace. To get a flavor of Rip's work check out his website at [www.RipNoel.com](http://www.RipNoel.com). He is really a creative force.

What I am pleased to announce is that Rip and I will be doing a workshop May 6-10, 2009 in the Smokies. We'll be working out of Cherokee, North Carolina, but will explore throughout the Park and, as always, will split our time between the field, the classroom, and critique sessions. The dates for this event are set to coincide with the second wave of wildflower blooming in the Smokies, which is as spectacular in its own way as the earlier explosion, but is often overlooked in favor of the first blossoms. This workshop is also listed on [EarthSongPhotography.com](http://EarthSongPhotography.com). The workshop tuition is \$850. If you have any questions, please contact me at **(828) 788-0687**, or **(828) 235-0974**, or email me at [don@earthsongphotography.com](mailto:don@earthsongphotography.com), or [mcgowan592@aol.com](mailto:mcgowan592@aol.com).

The last thing I want to mention is that I will be announcing a series of one-day workshops for later in the summer in the Smokies and on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The information on these events will be posted soon on the EarthSong Photography website, so be sure to check regularly and plan to join me for one of them.

Until next time, may the Spirit of Light guide your shutter release.

This newsletter is sent only to those people who have expressed an interest in receiving it. If you no longer want it, you can get off the mailing list by sending a note requesting removal to [don@earthsongphotography.com](mailto:don@earthsongphotography.com).



Sunrise, Racquette Lake