

Issue 19

Amber's Update

Happy Holidays!

May you find rest, light, creativity, good books, cozy sweaters, hot tea in a favorite mug, a meal made with love on the table and someone to share it with, the beauty of the changing season, and art all around you.

Image below: Tree made of giant pick-up sticks at sunset, Sonoma, California

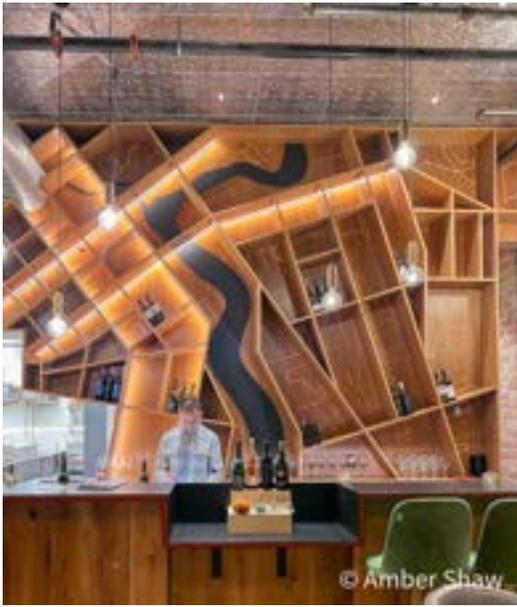


Three Things (+one more)



I spent a few days in Napa with good friends this month, at a house they were staying in for the week. It was a treat to have my oldest son Bennett join us. Also participating in the visit were two dogs and a puppy, a gecko named Crusty, crickets that made it sound like the Rainforest Cafe inside the house, and 82 houseplants.

When I get together with Nicole, art is involved, usually in as many forms as possible. She is an art teacher, artist, and art enthusiast, so knowledgeable and fun that I always learn something. We saw art, we ate and drank art, we bought art supplies, we made art. All the art. Not enough time for all the art we planned, because we also had to taste olive oil and walk the dogs and eat and talk about the word *philistine* and use it in conversation when possible.





2



"Wow those are some big nuts," I exclaimed with delight when seeing these in an outdoor courtyard after dinner. My husband keeps a very low profile, I don't know why he actually posed for this, but I'm not going to waste it.

3

My adult sons were all home for Thanksgiving. They were somehow aghast that there were no basketballs or footballs in the house, despite the fact that they have

not lived at home for quite some time. So, I volunteered to walk to Target and find some balls on Black Friday. On the way back, I attempted to acclimate myself to the sport by holding a football and slapping it with my hand and pretend-throwing it.

My oldest son, amused, had to correct my grasp on the football.

About this time on our walk, we crossed over the urban Guadalupe River and spotted a spawning salmon. I have never seen a salmon in this river. Trash and shopping carts, yes. Fish, no. In the drought years there isn't even water in the river.

I was astounded. As we got down closer to it, we realized it was still alive, just barely, and a very large 3 feet long, in just inches of water. It was at the end of its

life cycle, but this huge salmon gave me a sense of awe, and hope. By my calculations it had swum upstream about six miles from where the river meets the San Francisco Bay. We stood and watched it for a while, holding our balls; the basketball and footballs.

I posted the fish photo in a large Facebook group page for people who live downtown. Because of that simple share, a scientist was able to go collect the salmon for study (to see if it was a river native or from a hatchery) and I got to talk to a television reporter who saw my post and decided to do a story about it for the 6 o'clock news. The segment talked about how cleanup efforts in the river in the past few years have created a better environment for salmon to spawn. So so cool.

4

I love this poem and I think you might too.

It's a nice reminder that life happens at the table. Not the desk.

Perhaps the World Ends Here

By Joy Harjo

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

From The Woman Who Fell From the Sky by Joy Harjo. Copyright © 1994 by Joy Harjo

What I'm Reading

[The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness by Robert Waldinger MD and Marc Schulz PhD](#)

This book is based on many years of research from multiple longitudinal studies. It is a wealth of information and things to think about, and enjoyable to read. There are some thought exercises that have been revealing to me, like mapping your social universe and discovering ways to improve it. I borrowed this book from the library but I'm considering owning a copy to reference.

Cute Dog Photo



My sister's dog Ruby who has been a part of our lives for 15 years.
She is missed. Losing our furry friends is hard.



Best regards

Amber McClain Shaw, writer/artist/ambivert

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