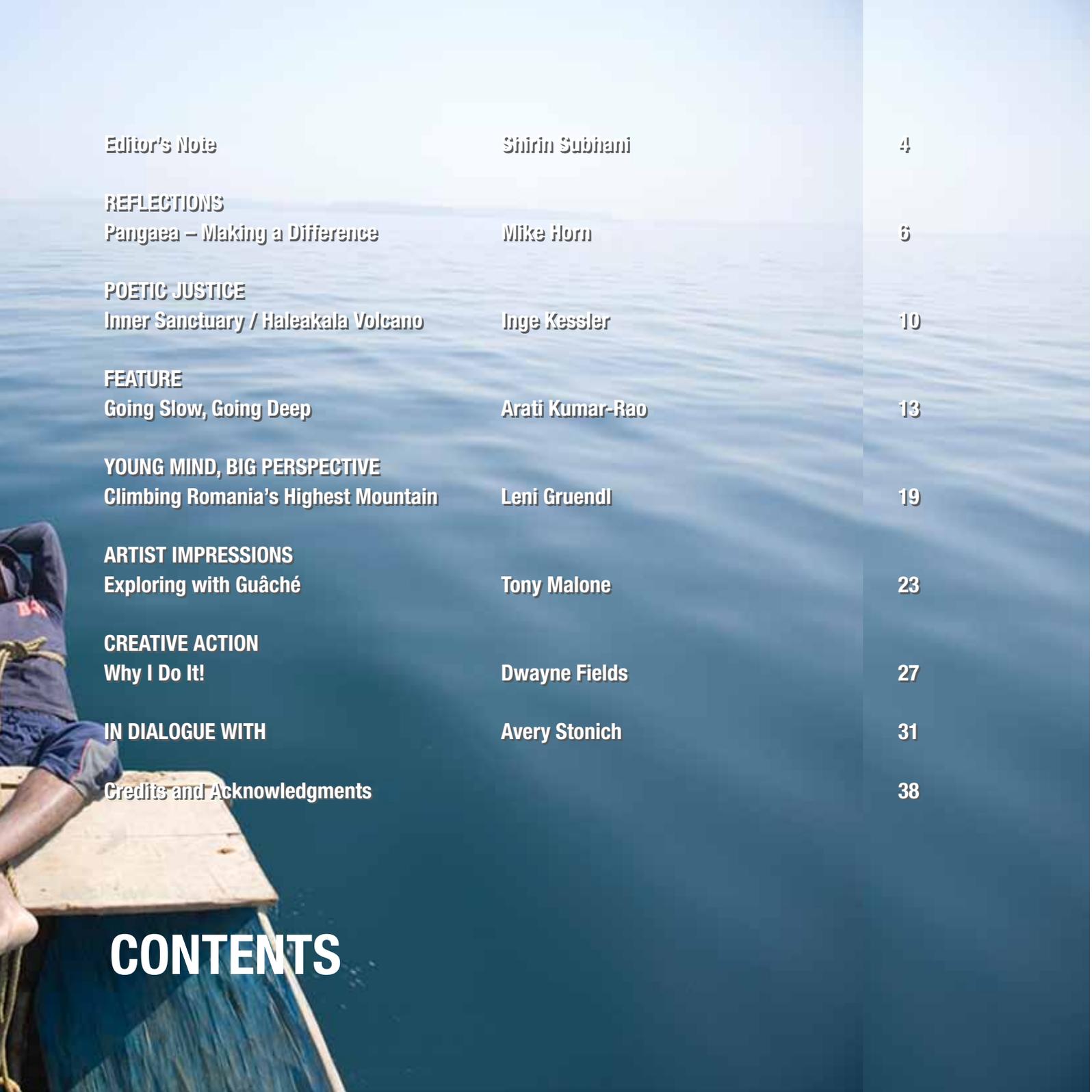


COURAGEOUS CREATIVITY

CREATIVE EXPLORING

NOVEMBER 2014





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IN DIALOGUE WITH AVERY STONICH

Avery is a freelance writer based in Boulder, Colorado, who has traveled to more than 40 countries in search of adventure. Her work has been published by *National Geographic Adventure*, *National Geographic Travel*, *Women’s Adventure*, *Bicycle Times*, *Elephant Journal* and *Travel Chronicles*. Visit her website at averystonich.com and follow her on Twitter and Instagram: @averystonich.



IN DIALOGUE WITH...

Shirin – Hi Avery! Thanks so much for talking with *Courageous Creativity*! How did your adventure of being a travel journalist start? Did you always love the outdoors as a child?

Avery – I’ve always loved to travel. And I’ve always loved to write. You could say I have it in my blood. My father is a writer who has lived in Australia my whole life. He has written several books about the Great Barrier Reef region. We used to go on 10-day island camping trips, bringing all of our food, water—everything. It sparked my love for the outdoors.

My mother really encouraged me to travel. I was thirteen when I first went to Europe. In college, I spent a semester in Tanzania. I remember walking into the study abroad office with the goal of finding an unusual place to go. When I was in Africa, I wrote long, descriptive letters to my mother and boyfriend (now husband). They saved every one.

In 2001, my husband and I traveled for a year. It was the early days of email, so for the first time I was able to write about my experiences for an audience of more than one. Everyone told me I have a knack for storytelling. My career has always orbited around writing. I started out writing educational signs and exhibits for parks and zoos. Through this I learned about exotic places with fascinating wildlife. My destination wish-list started to overflow.

Later I did marketing and public relations for the bicycle and outdoor industries. Then I decided to combine my passions with my career and focus on outdoor, adventure, and travel writing. It’s the best of all worlds.

Shirin – Please share more about what fascinates you most about traveling and exploring.

“I’VE ALWAYS HAD THIS DRIVE TO BREAK GENDER STEREOTYPES, PUSH MYSELF, AND NOT LET FEAR GET IN THE WAY. IT’S EMPOWERING TO HAVE THE COURAGE TO DIG DEEP AND TRY THINGS THAT FRIGHTEN ME. YOU NEVER CONQUER FEAR, YOU MERELY LEARN TO FACE IT.”



EVERETT AVERY STONICH

Avery – What I love most about travel and exploration is learning about other cultures and places and getting out of my comfort zone. There is no better way to gain perspective on yourself and the world than by experiencing the unfamiliar. It cultivates a global perspective – one that is rooted in compassion for people’s differences, and respect for the treasures of the natural world.

Shirin – In one of your essays about your experience climbing Notchtop in Rocky Mountain National Park, you talk about meeting your fears head on. Is this something you have to deal with regularly on your adventures? What is it that keeps you going despite the fears?

Avery – I intentionally seek experiences that challenge me.

Growing up, I was a tomboy, playing baseball with neighborhood boys rather than dressing up Barbies. I’ve always had this drive to break gender stereotypes, push myself, and not let fear get in the way. It’s empowering to have the courage to dig deep and try things that frighten me. You never conquer fear, you merely learn to face it.

When I finish something scary, I pat myself on the back and say, “I did it!” That feeling of accomplishment keeps me coming back for more.

Shirin – About climbing Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Western Europe, you said something really beautiful, “. . .if you follow their [the mountains’] lead, you might just find a graceful waltz that opens a world of adventure and lets your spirit soar.” Can you tell us more about this adventure?

Avery – Mont Blanc was a pivotal trip for me. I’ve always loved mountains—that’s why I’ve called Colorado home for 26 years. But until recently, I never had an urge to tackle technical terrain. In 2013, something switched during a magical day of backcountry skiing in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. My soul lit up and I felt this desire to learn more about mountains.

“IN 2013, SOMETHING SWITCHED DURING A MAGICAL DAY OF BACK-COUNTRY SKIING IN JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING. MY SOUL LIT UP AND I FELT THIS DESIRE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MOUNTAINS.”

IN DIALOGUE WITH...

My husband was thrilled and immediately signed us up for a mountaineering course. Then he convinced me to tackle Mont Blanc. After years of hesitation to try anything that involved an ice axe, all of a sudden I was totally game. I dove in head-first, which unlocked a new hunger for adventure in me.

So you could say the mountains called me in a way they never had before, and I followed their lead.

Mont Blanc was an amazing trip even though we didn't reach the summit. After bad weather forced us to turn back, we had an extra day, so we climbed the Cosmiques Arete, a technical, exposed snow and rock route just outside of Chamonix. I never would have believed I could do it. But I did, and it was awesome, and it gave me the confidence and drive to pursue more alpine adventures.

Shirin – Do you enjoy group adventures or are you more of a solitary traveler? Can you contrast the two experiences a bit?

Avery – I gravitate toward independent travel (with my husband or a few friends) because I think it helps me connect with a place. I love figuring out where to go, how to get there, what to eat, how to behave respectfully. Without the cocoon of a group, I interact more with the local culture.

Not to say that group travel doesn't have its place. It opens the doors of travel to people who are hesitant to explore new places without help. And in situations where guides are required, group travel is inevitable. In 2012, I went on a guided trip to Macchu Picchu in Peru with my friend's adventure travel company. I had a blast, gained perspective and insights I might not have had on my own, and now share the bond of this experience with a bunch of great people.

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AVERY STONICH

Shirin – What about exploring a place geographically versus exploring a place culturally, connecting with its people?

Avery – I love diving into foreign cultures. The more bewildered and confused I feel at first, the better. It forces me into the present moment. Time slows down. Everything becomes exciting—even everyday products on a foreign market’s shelves. It’s like being a child and discovering the world for the first time. Interacting with the locals then opens the experience, providing insight into daily lives.

Adventure travel—like mountain climbing or scuba diving—puts a different lens on an experience. These trips focus on an activity or a geographic feature rather than the culture. But I still learn about the culture because it is inextricably linked to geography. For example, in Nepal, I discovered how a majestic yet challenging mountain landscape has created a deeply spiritual culture amid tough living conditions. Fiji’s culture exudes a relaxed pace due to tropical heat and a lush environment where food seems to drip from every tree.

Shirin – Even with traveling to over 40 countries, you still think of your city Boulder as one of the greatest places on Earth. How does it feel to come home after a great adventure and stay connected to the spirit of exploration in your everyday life?

Avery – Boulder is a wonderful place to call home. I can find plenty of adventure around here. Colorado is vast, with thousands of acres of backcountry to explore. Typically I experience a period of readjustment after a big trip. When I plan and prepare for something for months, and then have a mind-blowing experience, it can be tough to return to a normal routine. I find myself yearning for excitement and thrill.

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IN DIALOGUE WITH...

It helps that I always have my next trip planned before the ink dries on my boarding pass. I'm constantly scheming and dreaming. In the meantime, I live vicariously by writing about people who venture to far-off places and tackle big adventures. I love telling these stories.

Shirin – Any upcoming adventures you are excited about?

Avery – I've recently taken up kiteboarding, which opens a whole new world of adventure. All of a sudden I'm seeking places with wind. It's a different approach to travel, and a fun way to look at the world. In December we're headed to Turks and Caicos in the Caribbean, which is supposed to be a good place for beginner kiteboarders.

I'm also planning a ski trip to Japan. I've never been to Northeast Asia, so I'm really excited to check it out. It will be a great combination of outdoor activity and culture. Skiing and sushi—perfect.

For my next big adventure, I hope to climb and ski Mount Moran in Wyoming. After I did the Grand Teton in June, some tasty ski lines on Mount Moran caught my eye. It would push my boundaries, but I'm up for it.

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