



A SPACE BETWEEN
SEASONS

Christopher O'Brien

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*“Historically,
pandemics have forced
humans to break with the
past and imagine
their world anew...”*





*this one is no different,
it is a portal, a gateway
between one world
and the next...*



*we can choose to walk
through it, dragging
the carcasses of our prejudice
and hatred, our avarice, our
data banks and dead ideas,
our dead rivers and smokey
skies behind us...*

*...or we can walk through lightly,
with little luggage, ready to
imagine another world.*

—ARUNDATI ROY



Backwords

The space between seasons is the distance between not knowing and knowing.

It's the difference between hypocritical and contrary.

It's the space between the ground on which we stand and the distant horizon.

Closer but further all at once.

It holds a multiplicity of ideas at the same time but always finds balance.

It is not static and hard to pin down when why and how it started or ended or ever did.

It has brought out the best in us and the worst.

It has laid bare before us our mistakes and transgressions and sometimes it's hard to take criticism.

It has polarized and galvanized us all at once.

Truth is hard to swallow sometimes let alone see.

And we all have our own truths. It's complicated.

It has unsettled the settled.

This darkness got to give



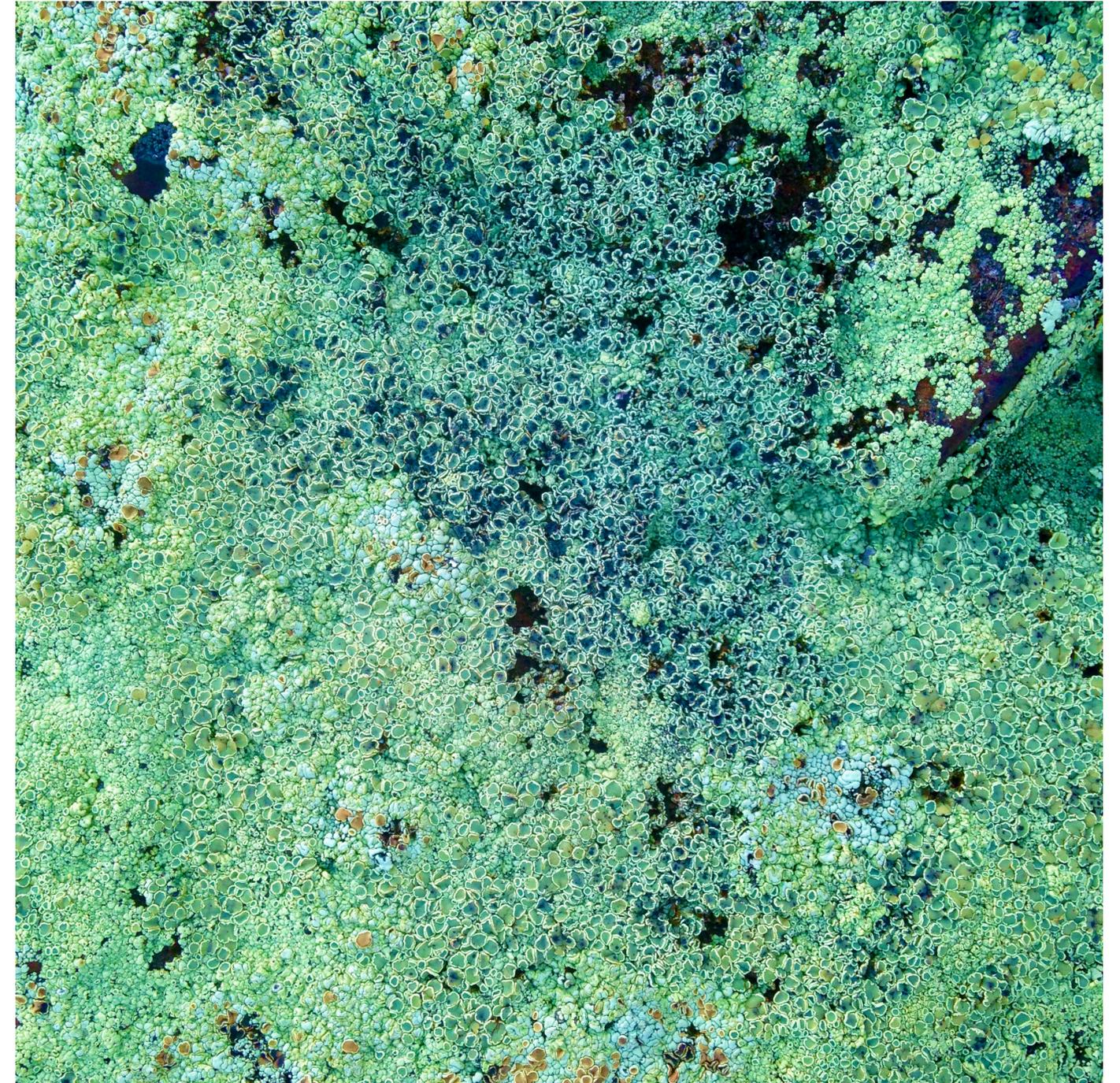


Our intersectional existence,
embedded in webs.
Complexly layered, interwoven with meaning and allusions,
networked, and dependent.

That interlocking matrix of economies, geographies and
ecologies,
race, gender, class, age, place, natural resources, climate change
An intricate connectedness
in which has been made
so manifest,
so visceral in this time.

Profound.
Unsettling.
Revelatory and luminous all at once
transmissions permeating
our collective membrane
vibrating through our very frames.

Its hard to hold on to when
we're disturbed, interrupted and
left stuttering before god.





*Once the creator was removed
from the creation, divinity became
only a remote abstraction, a social
weapon in the hands of religious
institutions. This split in public values
produced...an equally artificial and
ugly division in people's lives so that
a person pursuing heaven could turn
his heart against his neighbors and his
hands against the world.*

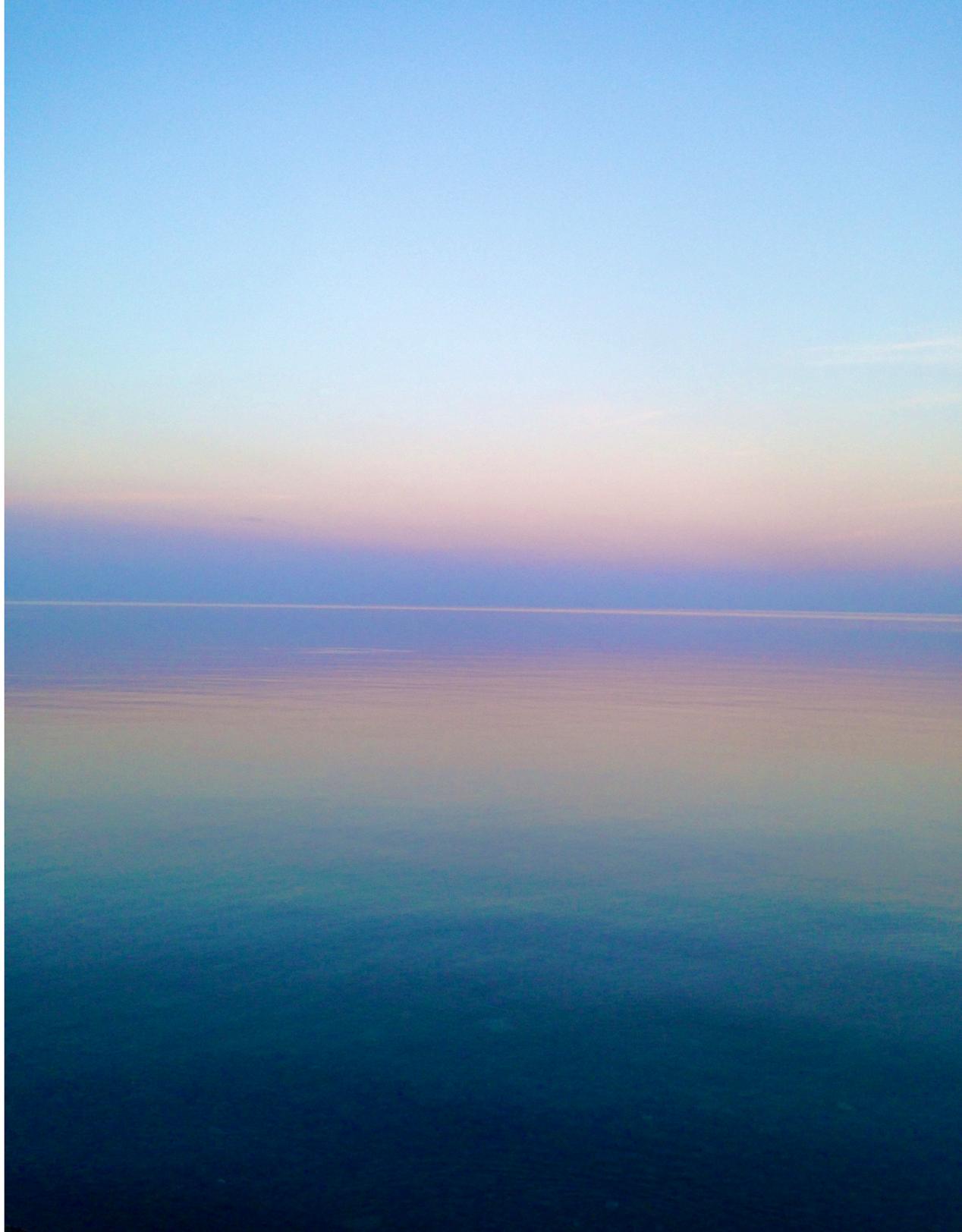
—WENDELL BERRY



Delusional Bifurcation
Let me be.
Breath in.
Breathe out.
Reckoning's squawking
This mourning
It's got too
Got to give



Shelter. In. Place.



Silence is deafening

It's like when you little and you're jumping on the trampoline and you fell and nobody would stop jumping so you could stand up again...and when everything shut down it felt like everybody stopped jumping and I can stand on my feet again, I can gain my footing. I need to use this time to get on my feet again.

—MICHELLE McMULLIN



Socially distanced circles colliding
cliques are crumbling,
hierarchies falling,
into a
disconnected
isolate
depression

Atmospheres of fear and anxiety
Are hard to handle.
Harder to hold.





In the Wood

I swear that every single fish-house, out-house, lodge and cabin, will have them up here in Frost Trail, Minnesota. You know you're in the North Country when there are antlers and an oversized Logging Company Calendar featuring a painting of a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman and his dog on the wall. Sharp chinned and looking crisp in his red felt jacket, high boots and riding breeches, the Mounty and his loyal Husky are painted into different scenes in the Western Canadian Rockies for every month, Everybody that thinks they're somebody has one, especially the "trying to put on the north woods appeal" resort types of joints, you know the one's I'm talking about, the ones with the chainsaw "art" out front, the stone fireplace, the log furniture covered in flannel, plastic moose that poop cigarettes when you lift their tails on display on the front desk. Sometimes these Canadian Mountie mountings will actually be in the calendar as they should be, the large calendars ARE advertisements. But, as it seems to be popular local custom, you simply cut the picture out, give it a frame and it's good to go, with a bit of class. This goes for magazines (Field & Stream is popular) as well as crocheting, maps, old t-shirts or what have you. If it's in a frame you're good to go, that's giving it class. If it can't go in frame, it's goes on a shelf. If it's on the top shelf it either is, or believed will be, worth money some day. If it's on the top shelf, it's special in some way to somebody special. The second shelf is for bragging, it's the level where most people will see it, maybe ask about it and more importantly, look at it. It's where the locals put the glory days, the photos of the big ones, the party pictures and trophies of all sorts.

That brings me to the obsession with antlers; I mean who knew there could be so many uses for antlers? Antler cribbage boards, bookends, coat hooks, door handles, chandeliers and coffee tables. The antler key chains and photo frames made by a local "artist" sit next to the shellacked moose terds, now that's local artistry, who knew moose shit could sell? Then again, the clientele are also one in the same with the kin that has the balls to ask in public but in a very city-fied manner "How old do deer get before they are actually considered a Moose?" I wish I was kidding but you can't make that kind of shit up.

“That’s right boys and girls, 100% renewable resource and profit for old Scotty over here, I swear to gawd! All I do is go out in the morning, figure out where the Moose left me a pile, fill a bucket or two, walk back to my place, spread them out like so ,so they dry a little, roll them in a ball and spray them until they’re shiny. Lickety-split!”

“Jesus Scotty! Shut the hell up already! I mean jesus, man! You’re bragging about following Moose around , picking up their shit for Christ sake, taking it home and hand polishing it, and then!..” Tim just choked on his beer, “...and then you have the desperation to sell it in public, in person! I don’t know who’s worse, you or the dumbass that bought the shit from a drunk ass, pony tailed old fuck with short shorts on.” That’s Tim, he’s an angry at the world guy and he can’t stand Scotty, or anybody else for that matter. I’ve been sitting on the same barstool listening to the same two guys for way too many Saturday nights by now and for at least most of the time I end up wondering “Why does Tim go to the bar in first place?” I mean “what in the gravy would drive a man to go out into a public he mostly hates, and hide on a corner stool at the bar, being pissed off the whole time?” Hell, I would just grab a twelve pack, put a party pizza in the microwave and park my ass on the couch to watch Red Green on satellite TV. Tim’s alright, although he used to be a different guy when I first met him seven years ago, my second winter guiding up here in the middle of nowhere, he was a lot more fun be around than he is now, before the whole Scotty and Sue thing went down.

Scotty shakes Tim’s bullshit off and heads to the jukebox on the wall. He is going on beer number eight and is ready to get his dancing shoes dirty. That’s what Scotty does, picks moose shit, dries it, makes it shiny, sells it to tourists, gets drunk and goes to the bar to do a little dancing with himself. It’s quite a show, I’ve been hanging out with Scotty for years now and it never gets old. When the wide eyed tourists wander in I like to pre warn them, I like to think it enriches their north woods experience. “Don’t touch him or give him direct eye contact or you’ll get what he’s got.” You’d be amazed at how many people look at him after that, kind of like the rubbernecking people do when driving by

accidents on Highway 61, people just can’t keep themselves from looking for the gore. One thing is for certain, Scotty thinks they’re admiring his dancing skill, and much to our locally ignorant glee, he steps it up a notch, throws in a spin or two and its Saturday Night Fever baby! Good stuff, you can’t make that kind of shit up.

There was time not so long ago when Tim would be sitting at the bar buying rounds, watching the Scotty show, in fact Scotty and Tim used be best friends. When I first moved here, Scott and Tim were rarely seen apart, hell I thought it was a north woods “ broke-back mountain” sort of thing until I heard Tim had a wife which was I thought was bullshit at first. I mean “what kind of woman would want to be with a workaholic guy who was obsessed with being a perfectionist, gone for months at a time?”

I met Sue when I went over to Tim’s Cabin to help him and Scott remodel his kitchen, she was outside smoking some salmon in the smokehouse she had made. Sue is a force to be reckoned with. She’s the type of gal that melts the hearts of the hardest men, renders them speechless and vulnerable. She’ll outwork, outshoot, and most importantly-out fish anyone and she is damn proud of it. She doesn’t take shit from anyone. Sue’s the type of gal that is rougher than she really looks and acts rougher than she really is. She’s got a soft side and she hates it. Although she’ll say that she is just fine and dandy by herself, it is also one of her biggest fears. She needs somebody; she can get by with just one somebody as long as they are around most of the time.

Tim loves his job way too much and he would be gone for a month, maybe two at a time and then be back for about two weeks and turn around on another trip. Scotty and I would stop in to check in on Sue for Tim while he was away. I think that after awhile Scotty and her started kind of started liking each other I know for a fact that Scotty was cuckoo for coco-puffs over her. He’d paddle the four miles over to their place every day when Tim was gone. Sue knew he was, I asked her one time, she knew she could have Scotty anytime she

wanted but she didn't, Scotty was a great guy, do anything for you type of guy, but he was strange kind a duck, a duck in which Sue wasn't going to swim with, at least not for awhile.

It's a strange thing the way the whole "thing" went down. Tim was out on a research trip to count the local wolf-pack in the Frost River area, he was a wildlife biologist with the Forest Service at the time. The Frost River is a long, North flowing Class 5 river. It has a reputation that strikes the common sense back into most people's heads. It drops elevation suddenly and forcefully, with tight turns and a steep bank, if the falls don't scare you, the white water in between them will. The area around it is the most wild and remote part of the wilderness in Northern Minnesota, very few have had the stamina to make the trip, let alone the skills to navigate it. Tim knows his stuff and he has a reputation for it. He was scheduled to be out for two months, nothing out of the normal, Tim is never late, he takes pride in the fact and after about a week and a half after he was overdue, I heard Sue saying to Scott, "God I am so sick of worrying like this all the time every time he goes, and now he's late on top of it"

"If he's not back by tomorrow I'll head back there to take a peak, I know his itinerary." Scott was a bit concerned himself. He'd been back on the Frost many times, he knew it and he knew what could happen.

With loaded canoe, gun and provisions Scotty set out, for two days he kept paddling along Tim's route finding nothing. He shot three shots into the air at every portage or campsite he crossed or stayed at, and listened for a call back. Nothing. Five days in, Scotty was running the high falls of the Frost when he spotted what looked to be an orange tarp on the shoreline below the falls, shortly after that he found a paddle and what looked to be a piece of the gunwale to a canoe. It wasn't looking good; Scotty saw the smashed and partly submerged canoe near the shore. He paddled the shoreline looking for any sign of Tim. After about eight miles he finally spotted him. Tim was laying in a fetal position, shivering in a sleeping bag on a rock ledge under a cedar tree. For some reason that he his still trying to wrap his head

around, Scotty suddenly found himself faced with a strange and dark dilemma, the thought crossed his mind about leaving Tim there. Scotty had been thinking about Sue an awful lot the last couple of months, he knew he had to give up on that dream up as long as Tim and him were friends, it just wouldn't be right. But what if Tim was out of the picture all together? Scotty knew Sue hated being alone, he knew her well enough to know that much by now and add the fact that she had been flirting with him pretty hard recently. He had convinced himself that if it wasn't for Tim, he'd be Sue's man; he had always wanted to be that man, ever since he met Tim and Sue twenty years ago. "I figured I could just say I never found him, nobody would ever know, he'd be done and gone by the time the Forest Circus got around to finding him." Scotty told me later after it was all said and done. Scotty stashed his canoe, cracked a warm beer and hid in the brush where he sat there watching Tim from across the river for hours thinking about it. "Would that be murder, I didn't kill him, I just didn't save him, right?" he asked himself.

After twenty years up in the Frost, Scotty wasn't sure yet whether he was a good man or a bad one, he had gotten to know all too well both sides of himself, he had his moments. He liked to think himself a good man and he was smart enough to know himself well enough that after his usual twelve beers, that chances were pretty good he'd spill his beans. With Tim securely strapped into the canoe and as comfortable as possible, Scotty painstakingly dragged him up river for six days until finally paddling out. Tim had capsized his canoe, broke his leg and arm going downriver and knocked himself unconscious on the rocks under the falls he underestimated, he wandered aimlessly in tight circles for days, and when Scott found him he was severely hypothermic, malnourished, dehydrated and seemingly delusional, for six days he'd scream "you'd kill me!" at Scotty before slipping back into unconsciousness. "He must have hit his head pretty good, all the way back he was saying that!" Scotty said later when he told me about it. Tim was fine in a few days, he had lost his self confidence though and he a wreck, he had prided himself on his outdoor and survival skills, his reputation was tarnished, his canoe smashed and

he was scared of going back out for the first time in his life. Tim is type of guy that expects way too much himself, obsessed with this self-defined and enforced perfection. After those first few days, Sue had pretty much drawn the line in the sand as far as Tim's travels were concerned. She was done with it, she had put up with it for long enough, and he knew she wanted him around and he had his fun long enough, it was her turn now. I don't think that Tim took her very seriously; after a couple of weeks had passed he had decided that if he was to go out, he was going to go out on top. He had to; he'd be a broken man if he didn't. He volunteered and was assigned to new two month assignment counting bears. He told Sue about it, she just simply told him that it was his decision. He left for the trip not too long after that, when two months had passed he came back, on time, restored and happy. It was a good trip to be the last trip. He could live with it.

When he got back Sue was gone. There was a note on the cabin door that looked like it had been there quite awhile,

It was your Decision, Sue.

Tim was stunned. After he unpacked his stuff and warmed the cabin up he decided to head down to the bar to see what the word was on where she went. He found out from a stranger that she moved in with some dude named Scotty. Tim paddled past Scott's place on his way home that night, only to find out that the stranger was right, Sue was with the man that he thought was his best friend, the same man who watched him shivering on a rock ledge for hours that day.

Resilience; As we have
always done.



Survivance;
Sisu

Bonnie Tikkanen has owned Four Seasons Supper Club for decades. It is the only restaurant in Finland, Mn, a small town of about 200 people located in rural north-east Minnesota.

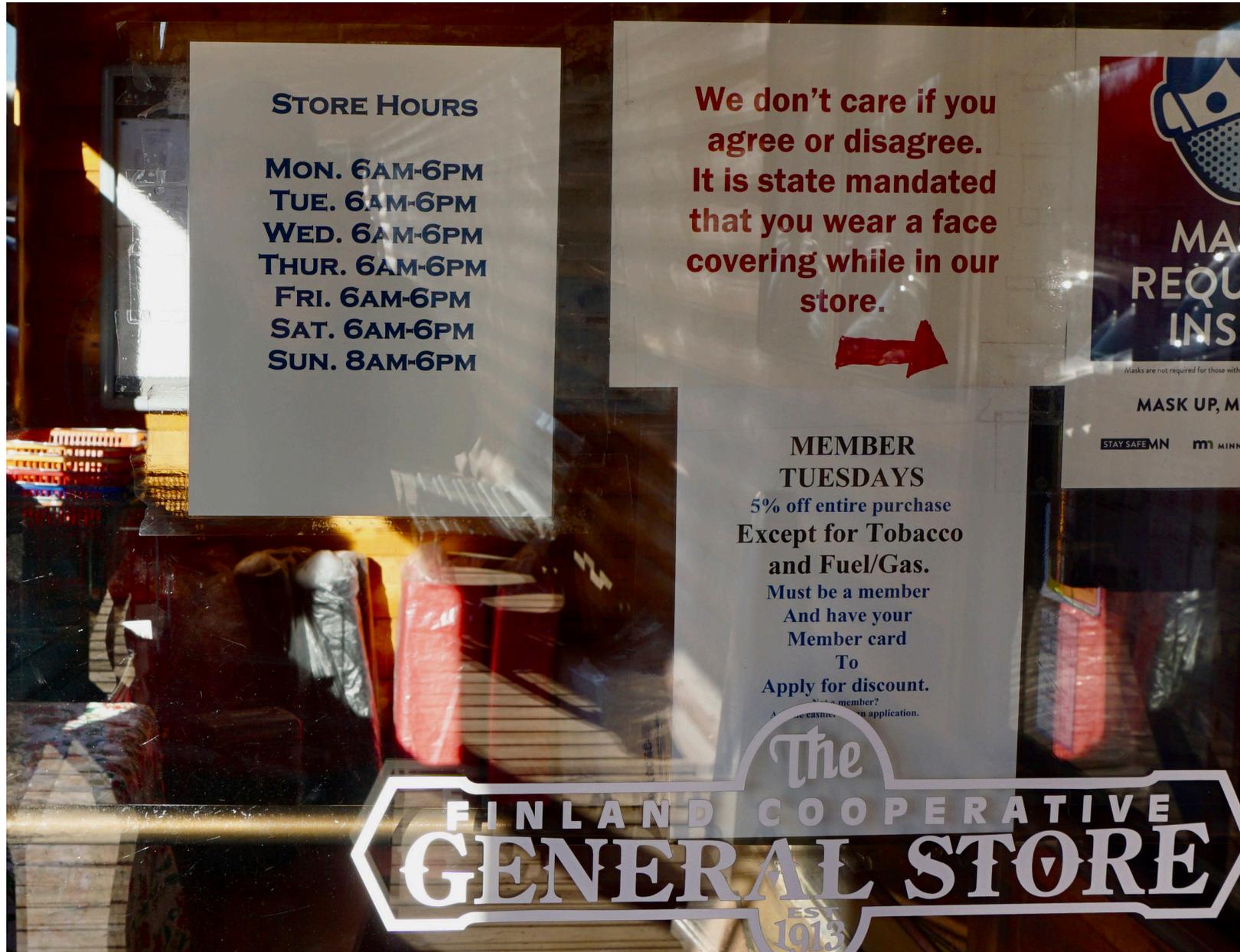
Her restaurant has remained open seven days a week while many others have closed due to the pandemic.



Essential;
As we will always be.

The Finland Cooperative and General Store is the first and oldest continually operating cooperative in Minnesota and despite obstacles of historic proportions, the staff has retained that tradition.





The view of the pandemic varies greatly when viewed within and through a rural lens. It's complicated.

Foreward

Wafts of sweetgrass from somewhere out there amongst the cool purple air that the sun's bringing up with it this morning. People are saying that the pandemic gets all the credit for making the skies bluer while it scours our planet. I don't know. Honestly, I have enough to think about as I sit, crouched over my laptop, windows open to the tall grass, sucking down coffee while scanning the horizon. I'm not sure what it is it yet but it'll come to me. Change always does I guess.

Change always seems to be hanging out with uncertainty, I'm not sure whether or not they're always together but it certainly seems so. Both of them are hard to pin down. It's hard to know the right thing to do amongst a pandemic of untruths. It might just be me but it's hard to be a creative problem solver when the atmosphere reeks of fear and loathing. And let's face it, we've got some problems.



