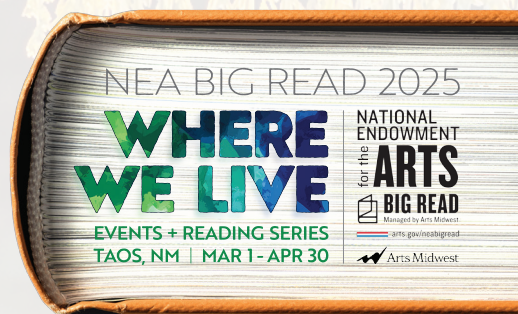




WHERE WE LIVE

An anthology
of poetry &
short prose
by Taos writers



NEA Big Read
is a program of the
National Endowment
for the Arts in
partnership with
Arts Midwest.

This is an anthology of writings on the theme **Where We Live**, a part of the Taos Big Read 2025. All contributing writers live in the Taos area. The writings are presented in the authors' alphabetical order.

The Big Read is a reading program supported by the National Endowment for the Arts. Activities are happening in Taos this spring 2025. The program is designed to inspire meaningful conversations, celebrate local creativity, elevate a wide variety of voices and perspectives, and build stronger connections in each community. The selected book for this year's Big Read in Taos is Ross Gay's ***Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude***.

This anthology results from an open call and is not curated. The views expressed in the works do not necessarily represent those of the Taos Center for the Arts, SOMOS, the Town of Taos Public Library, or any of the programming partners.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Thriving in Thin Air , Evelyn Aucoin.....	2
The Plate , Louise Blair.....	3
The Mountain Behind My House , Michael Burwell	4
Dust Storm Serenata , Shelly Catterson	5
Returning to El Prado , Katherine DiBella Seluja.....	6
Prologue and Excerpt from “The Perfectly Beautiful Day” , Dora Dillistone.....	7
SNOW COMING, SHE SAYS , Maria Teresa Garcia.....	8
Moving to Taos from Chicago , Claire Haye	9
Hay Taos Vida Mia , Luigi Jaramillo	10
paseo del cuervo , Kate Marco.....	11
before the streetlights come on , Carrie Nassif	12
Diamond Mountain , L. Zach Shatz.....	13
The Poleo , Bradley Sleep.....	14
Is This How My World Ends? , Jean E. Stevens	15
Move to Taos ~ Loose Your Spouse , Elaine Taylor.....	16
More Than Just A Place , Tee	17
Yoga for Back Care (and other magic) , Moira Trachtenberg	18
hawk/magpie , John S. Whitman	19
Becoming People of Place , Todd Wynward	20

Thriving in Thin Air

by Evelyn Aucoin

A thousand miles from my birthplace, and first fifty years of life, I willingly part
Creating a completely different existence, 9000 feet above my sea-level start
Embracing this new reality, living close to nature is this empty-nest twosome
Leaving city life behind, choosing instead to abide in proximity to the Taos hum

Summer afternoon temperatures no longer simulating the surface of the sun
Loving so many things about living here, this fact is number one
Hiking with the dogs; finding time for riding my horse
Golfing is a new endeavor; you will also find me on the course

Fall sunsets bringing the rut, signaled by the elk's high-pitched, lust-fueled cry
Lying awake, listening, and stargazing at Great Bear in the expansive New Mexico night sky
Nature's Tinder; there is no need for swiping right
Bugling bulls are successful making love connections; it continues all night

Winter nighttime negative temperatures delivering a shock
When the dogs are outside pottyng, I judiciously watch the clock
Passing the coldest, snowy days inside, evolving into a heat-seeking Miss-al
Puttering around my warm home, vacuuming dog hair with my beloved Bissell

Spring mornings with ravens interrupting the peace, dive-bombing, as I sit
Successfully taunting our four dogs into a deafening, barking fit
Dusk inciting a frenzy at the hummingbird feeders; hovering beggars
Eyeing the bellies of these aviary fairies; hypothesizing which ones are preggers

Adopting this homeland, appreciating it for both what it is, and what it is not
Remember, everything adopted is chosen; for this locale was also sought
A volunteer conversion; from gulf-coast girl to mountaineer
Adapting and immersing myself in each season, year after year

The Plate

by Louise Blair

Such Joy
An overturned
trash can lid
Filled with water
And a few round rocks.
Has brought.

The first user's were a small
Flock of sparrows.

In an instant
The lid became the neighborhood
Swimming pool

On the Patio
Two bull snakes decided to nap.
It took me hours
Clanging pots and pans to drive them
Down the steps to the Chamisa
That surrounds the house.

Passing the water
They stopped
Drinking from the improvised pool
Long and deep

Bees and hornets crawl down
The sides of the stones
To sip the life sustaining water.

My personal favorite visitors are
Rocky Mountain Blue Birds
Having a reddish chest
And incredible blue under their wings

Last night a bunny rabbit
This morning a small coyote

Who would know
An overturned
Trash can lid
Filled with water
And round stones
Could sustain an ecosystem
And bring such joy

The Mountain Behind My House

by Michael Burwell

Longing, we say, because desire is full
of endless distances...

—Robert Hass

The mountain behind my house
is called Vallecito.

Here they say La cuchara es llena, the spoon is full
when snow fills the bowl below the summit.

My landlord and wife in earlier days climbed it
but now they only bicycle to town.

I almost climbed it once but my
partner had to turn back.

Cratered and eroded, I turn too much
to the other life, a mannikin twisted

by minute explosions of old marriages
that disappeared incrementally, no sight

until the aftermath; from the lost softening
of the small bright voices of children's children.

After wine with friends, or a walk
through mountain flowers,

I am home to look at you, shear
and distant, steering clouds.

Not the tallest peak, but the one taught
to speak for the whole range:

the code of all mountains. The wordless,
indecipherable language

that feeds even at night, that nourishes
all creatures at your feet, turns

my body to genuflection,
the faint stone code reaching

down to me. The code, the code
tapping out even as I turn

to the simple, daily folly
of turning away.

Dust Storm Serenata

by Shelly Catterson

Inside thick adobe walls, mud and rocks. Outside under apricot and plum trees, full of vulnerable birds. Homeland of my neighbor's abuela, with a root cellar once full of fruit, vegetables, meat. In the thick dirt ceiling, we found bones, a descanso cross with names too faint to read, a den for Striped Skunks. We miss the horno, the long portal we only witness in story. When we walk, we find more vecinos, dogs who ask for belly rubs, the empty booze bottles and needles. Showy Milkweed along the acequia and the dying Monarch Butterfly. We hear the beat of horses, stray cows, turkeys, Genízaro drums and singing, Ranchera music, motorcycles, gun shots. And Spanish, a colonizer language turned north, that sounds like music. At the hardware store, at the post office where a beloved elder serenades "Volver" as we wait in line for our packages. Church bells that ring of faith and pain from abuse. We live where us whites behave as our land-grabbing ancestors, oblivious to the roots here. As if any of us can live without water. As if only our desires matter, not poverty, violence, history, nature.

While the Pueblo evolves in Tiwa words, stands without so-called conveniences. As so many forces try to steal their dignity, their survival. While we need to learn from Natives. From any Brown Red elder who remembers when humans belonged to the soil, sheep roaming hillsides, without fences. Enough water and Piñon nuts, corn, beans and squash for all homes.

We are here, every day grateful our neighbors are not white. Where we want to listen, to live, connected to the land, straining in the drought, the wind.

We don't expect anything to be easy, just slower. A pulse, a ripple, a shrinking treasured puddle.

Returning to El Prado

by Katherine DiBella Seluja

We were returning to El Prado
after a dinner out, food too salty but we didn't mind.

Pulling into the gravel drive, a pair of quail scurried across the road.
Quick hop and flutter into the sage. Top knots gold leaf illuminated by sunset.

Then a stroll across the field to check on the acequia. Running
all the way down Blueberry Hill, Antonio had told me that morning.

Antonio cares for the trees and may like them a bit more than people
but he'll tolerate you if you can hold your own in the garden.

The acequia tolerates us as well, as we compliment its beauty
but we know it will keep running with or without our approval.

Reminding me of Big Tesuque, where we said goodbye to Jorge.
Snow up to our knees, we released the ashes of your best friend.

You said he looked like a cloud and I saw the water painted
gray on ice cold blue. When I can't sleep I picture Jorge

in that small cloud and the way he paused for a moment
on the surface, before tumbling into his future downstream.

Prologue and Excerpt from "The Perfectly Beautiful Day"
by Dora Dillistone

36 degrees, 31 minutes and 34 seconds North, Latitude
105 degrees, 36 minutes and 13 seconds West, Longitude
Ninety miles north of Santa Fe
Around the curves and followed the river.
Through the canyon we traveled.
Suddenly appearing in the distance,
the Rio Grande River and gorge,
twisting and turning, reflecting the sun.
From Creede, Colorado to the Gulf of Mexico, the river does run.
To see it the first time takes your breath away.
The River will irrigate fields as it carves out the land.
A land of enchantment some people say.
The heavens above are clear at night.
Stars and moon seem remarkably bright.
To the East are the mountains.
Due West lies the desert.
The space, light and colors mix in between.
It sharpens the senses, and we see the unseen.
We listen to sounds never heard before.
The MorningStar family,
All the animals and humans that came to stay,
Welcome you now to this mystical, magical place they call home.
Every season has its own smell.
Different colors paint the earth and sky.
Every living being has its own language.
They speak of life and love in their own special way.
Every season has its own reason,
to celebrate life on this land where we live.
We all know the smell and tastes of the land.
And understand well,
that every day is in every way
A perfectly wonderful, beautiful day.

SNOW COMING, SHE SAYS

by Maria Teresa Garcia

A process in the air, hollyhocks dormant, pale stalks bare, bend. Sagebrush yellows, pollen spicy, bittersweet. Juniper bark hangs, dusty strips seasoned by age. Prickly pears, spines abundant, soapweed yucca at home in rocky soil. Piñon tree drops bronzed nuts and small brown cones—offerings—to its roots. Wood stove burnings curdle morning's cloudless sky.

last summer's enjarre
abuelita's adobe
mudded in the old way

after A Process in the Weather of the Heart by Dylan Thomas

Moving to Taos in 1978 from Chicago

by Claire Haye

Long ago when the world was younger, I fell in love with the beauty of Taos, with the brilliant warm winter sun, with endless days of open skies, with snowstorms that brought fluffy crystal snow,
and in the spring a world saturated with the scent of lilacs blooming. Coming from the Midwest, I had never seen such bright days.

I was amazed by the originality of my fellow villagers, with their casual "dress however you wish" the prevailing mode.

I wore my stained studio clothes out for coffee in humble cafes filled with other artists. I purchased the local paper every Thursday.

I learned to love red chili, enchiladas and sopapillas with honey.

Randomly, a lonely cat or a friendly dog followed me home from my afternoon walk. Soon I had a household full of quaint dogs and stubborn cats.

The neighborhood skunks came by every night for a visit walking jauntily past my bedroom. Lying in bed at night, I would often get a faint whiff of skunk... the dogs were used to this nightly occurrence, and they would woof softly at the skunk...it certainly sounded like a friendly greeting.

There were incredible moments of sudden rain followed by a quick sun return. Rainbows would often appear ... it was miraculous ...a bridge to a new life.

I was grateful to have escaped the grey crowded city. I had found a haven for my creativity. I could finally be myself.

Today, as real estate values rise and chain stores move in,
Taos has become another American town with just a hint of its former eccentric charm.
I wistfully remember an older wiser Taos.

Hay Taos Vida Mia

by Luigi Jaramillo

Hay Taos Vida Mia: Hay Taos Vida Mia-Ya no aguanto la chansa que el momento llega-Cuando mi alma descansa-En el mero mero fondo de tu sagrada corazon.-Hay Taos Vida Mi-With your skies so deep and your mountains so true-You leave me breathless with a deep longing for more,more,more.-Can I have a little more chili with my cultura?-Hay Taos Vida Mia-Last years poleclimb for San Geronimo Fiestas was the best one ever.-The hitos went crazy for Invent Event.-The monsoon rains came late but the farmers market was bigger and better than ever before.-Hay Taos Vida Mia-Dime la verdad.-Hay otro lugar mas rico que tu?-Yo pienso que no ni me digas que si.-Hay Taos Vida Mia-Cisco Guevarras stories crowned him the king.-Dennis Hoppers El Cortez Theatre sprung to life again-Stirring up Easy Rider back into the saddle.-Kit Carson Park nailed down show after show and music popped up all over the place from Soldados to Daleee and OmniHum to Ennui.-Hay Taos Vida Mia-Will our querencia get us through the hard times to come?-Pues quien sabe bro?-Only our suenos y sudor will know for shure!-Hay Taos Vida Mia-Where would be without Mahualu your mountain?-It protects us from ET"s of the 3rd kind.-Your river brings life to our valley that feeds our acequias.-Your pueblo celebrates you with San Geronimo Fiestas, dances and bonfires that spark up the night sky.-Hay Taos Vida Mia-Entre fiestas y matansas paseos y comanches-Entre verde y seco peach y pelo-que vivan las fiestas y que viva Larry Torres" Can~utito!

paseo del cuervo

by Kate Marco

I spend
my mornings
with
the ravens,
the koshares
of the trees,
the silences
of dawn,
broken
by their voices,
filling
Taos air-
air so fresh
and crisp,
it tastes clean
inside my lungs-
clouds wrap
their wispy bodies,
around
the mountain's edge,
as magpies fly
from here
to there,
and prairie dogs
work through the night,
to emerge
from their
long rest.
this is the time
of in-between,
winter barely
hanging on,
its last few breaths,
still whitening peaks,
while spring softly gnaws
at the hard cold ground,
greening bit by bit.
and the ravens
keep on chatting,
sticking to their stories,
letting all the secrets
out.

before the streetlights come on

after Joy Harjo's "For Calling the Spirit Back from Wandering the Earth in Its Human Feet"

by Carrie Nassif

fish that plastic handle from your barefoot floorboards :: stretch to
set it up and into the socket it keeps falling loose from above you ::

crank that sunroof open all the way :: ask wind to lift the sunlit
the incandescent strands of your hair/your heirs :: let the air

swim among your gills and then squeeze it gently out again
with every flapping wingspan :: then let the ancestors whisper

the secrets of the one within us all who does the seeking :: let the
feral cottonwood tree and her seedling puffs hold us all fast to the

spinning sky :: and when you fall/fault/falter you can always
rinse the wounds in your own salt water :: let the outer layers

slough back to earth when they're done with you and climb at
night into the whale's deep heart if she will let you :: curl snug

into her dark-ness/next/nest :: let her song bring you curious
and whole into your expanded body of stars because one day

you will be the one leaning on a wobbly screen door calling your
own name out to come back to the only home there is :: within

before the lavender of dusk dissolves the backyard :: the whole
block into the inkiest of spacetimes :: now :: zithered in fireflies

Diamond Mountain

by L. Zach Shatz

home at last
the mountain's doing
it's said
this mountain chooses
who finds home
in Taos town
spilling from Taos Pueblo
land of the heart
here beats
art
spirituality
consciousness
of the mountain's timeless
dream
share
listen, express
the mountain is patient
with those who
love
this mountain's soul
is a diamond's
refracting
imagination

The Poleo

by Bradley Sleep

Where we live is Poleo Road, named after the mint that grows along the Acequia Madre De Rio Costilla. We call this place "The Poleo".

Where we live- birds sing in the bosque, acequias gurgle, and animals roam.

The sky and sun have a dialogue with clouds and winds.

Fields run acequia water down toward foothills that are like churches rising upward.

Ravens fly, tucking wings doing barrel rolls.

Seeds are planted, and crops grown.

Cows are taken to the mountains every primavera to roam in high places, that cowboys and cowgirls dream about until reunited in the Fall.

Beavers are doing the same work they've done for millennia, creating landscapes and administering precious waters.

Things are getting drier. Greener fields are yielding to brown tones. Snows aren't as deep anymore.

Mountain trees are struggling in valley floors. It's getting warmer.

Some things are the same, but change is in the air, in the sun, in people's minds.

New plants and trees, new people, are coming. Old plants and trees, old people, are leaving.

New animals and insects are coming, birds never seen before making appearances filling the air with never heard before songs.

The winds, bien fuerte blow, heralding these changes.

The elk and deer, coyotes and mountain lions are along for the ride trying to hang on, just like us people.

Where we live or donde vivimos, la gente de Costilla, Garcia y Amalia trabajan tan duro, con amor en dentro de corazones, sonando de cosechas buenas.

Where we live I catch glimpses of the past, making me dream and feel it around me.

Where we live I see ghosts in my periphery, people and things from bygone days at work en la casa or jardins, talking to themselves, singing, storytelling- egging themselves forward trying to hang on.

Is This How My World Ends?

by Jean E. Stevens

Over 1.5 Celsius rise
Over 12,000 global nukes
Over 46,000 dead in Gaza
Over 62,000 dead in Sudan
Over 55,000 dead in Ukraine
Is this how my world ends?

Under the sun's rays
Under the fake news
Under the felon despot
Under the machismo
Under the 1 percentile
Is this how my world ends?

Above the thin blue line
Above the tipping point
Above the racial stereotypes
Above the starving mobs
Above the dying forests
Is this how my world ends?

Below the fracked wells
Below the dead coral
Below the plutonium waste
Below the endless chatter
Below the radiation
Is this how my world ends?

Is this how your world ends?

Is this how our world ends?

Move to Taos ~ Loose Your Spouse

by Elaine Taylor

I moved to Taos because my husband (at the time) got a job here. I learned early on that the mountains accepted or rejected the people that move here. This is the smallest town I've ever lived in. After 3 years in Taos and 40 years of marriage, the mountains made their choice and rejected him. Me? I was tired of moving, finally I was in a place of beauty and peace. So, I stayed. I'm here. Taos is not an easy place sometimes but there is always the beauty. I've lived most of my life near the ocean and now I've expanded my heart to love the mountains of Northern New Mexico. For the first time in my life, I am a minority in this population. I have a deeper understanding of what that feels like and I am grateful for the experience.

More Than Just A Place

by Teee

Where we live is more than just a place-
It is the music we carry with us and within us

The tune we hum to soothe our restless minds
The beat and the beats
That cause our souls to unwind

Our bodies must live
Within the sounds of the present,
But remember,
Our spirits are fueled by the rhythms and of the past.

Yoga for Back Care
and other magic

by Moira Trachtenberg

Lying on our backs
palms up we are invited
to picture the depth of the creases
in each hand
to feel the power
of our lifelines
and I find myself holding
the Rio Grande Gorge
I feel the vacuum of the great void
between haggard cliff walls
and the terror is real enough to feel
I could plummet
into the space I myself
am holding

And the terror is real enough to make
each palm sweat
until the trickle in each groove
becomes rivulet
becomes the rush of *frío frío* Rio Grande
until a singing bowl awakens me
to the stunning unlikeliness
of falling when I'm already lying
supine on padded terra firma
And yet now each hand
has been forever transformed—
Watch them crush rock
Throw lightning
Capture wind

hawk/magpie

by John S. Whitman

Walking up the steep, narrow lane, I stop. Twenty yards ahead a hawk on the road and, amazingly, a magpie darting in from the verge, making quick, rough pecks at the raptor, then flashing back out of harm's way. Again the magpie attacks the more powerful bird, eliciting a response timid beyond expectation, a quick sidewise movement of the head which sends the magpie backpedaling to the safety of two feet away. The hawk takes flight, rising only a few inches from the ground, flying up the lane. I see then why it's been so lackluster, that it's burdened with a kill. It's what the magpie wants, what has emboldened it to this harrying.

The hawk lands almost immediately, only a few more yards away, and again the magpie moves in, pecking and flapping its wings.

Turning to face the scavenger, the hawk loses hold of the kill. Not dead, a dove, freed from the talons, bursts away from the melee, flying right at me, over and away.

The game's over, the dove the winner. The magpie and the hawk disappear in different directions.

I continue up the lane. Everything quiet now, as though nothing had happened, as though the contest a shadow traced in air, desperate wingbeats having left no trace.

A single, tiny, downy feather lifts weightlessly past.

Becoming People of Place

by Todd Wynward

Taoseños have a word I want to adopt: *querencia*, “cherished place,” a place of belonging, where we draw strength. I want to adopt *querencia*. But can I adopt this place, and have it adopt me? I moved here 25 years ago. Under what conditions do I get to call Taos home?

To become people of place is one of the greatest invitations the Earth offers to our hyper-mobile, hyper-individual age. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer invites us all to re-place ourselves—to covenant to a particular watershed and its beings. We are Earth’s children, and “her teachings of reciprocity are for all.” Then Kimmerer extends the invitation further: “You can set aside the mindset of the colonizer and choose to belong.” But how?

Kimmerer suggests a way: become naturalized to place. Throw off the mindset of the colonizer, the tourist, voyeur, speculator, exploiter, bargain-hunter. Come with respect and open hands, to share and show up, not exclude and extract. Re-learn rooted right relationship.

I did a little digging. According to US policies, immigrants seeking naturalized citizenship must meet eight criteria:

Commit to the chosen place.

Learn the laws of the land.

Maintain a continuous presence.

Respect local language and customs.

Demonstrate good moral character, modeling right relationship.

Know a place’s history.

Contribute to the place’s best interest.

Pledge allegiance to your new home.

These criteria have been a good path to follow these 25 years. Taos is my place. It’s my home, where I find *querencia*. It’s where I live and breathe and have my being.

But watch out: we change when we become naturalized citizens of Taos. We no longer want to buy every resource, assume every privilege, demand every comfort and exert every arrogance. You become the bumper sticker: “Don’t change Taos. Let Taos change you.”