

The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works

Ron Riecki, Editor

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Selected poetry and short stories from native authors reflect on the heritage and landscape of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Michigan's sparsely-populated Upper Peninsula is a place of forests, hills, and swamps. Its summers are almost unbearably beautiful; its winters legendarily harsh. In literature, it looms large, with shades of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, Hemingway's *Big Two-Hearted River*, and Robert Traver's *Anatomy of a Murder*.

The Way North anthology features a grab-bag of poetry and short prose from the UP's small but active community of creative writers. Many have connections to area universities or the arts communities that cluster around them. A few hail from Native American communities, small towns, or isolated cabins.

The highlights are two prose pieces by Grand Marais café owner Ellen Airgood, crisply and matter-of-factly portraying both the intimate isolation of a sparsely populated place and the hectic work of tourist season in a lakefront town.

Other notable prose contributors include Steve Hamilton, Edgar Award-winning author of the Alex McKnight mystery novels, and Michigan Author Award winner John Smolens, author of *Cold*, *Fire Point* and other novels. Ojibwa viewpoints are represented by April Lindala's story of a woman and an emotionally charged powwow, and by Sally Brunk's free-verse meditations on family and traditions. Jonathan Johnson, whose work has appeared in *Best American Poetry*, contributes an introduction, a poem, and a short story. Poetry contributors also include Rona Jaffe Award winner Catie Rosemurgy and Michigan Notable Book Award winner Keith Taylor.

Some of the most accessible and engaging poems are by less recognized writers like Andrea Scarpino, whose fast-paced, quasi-formal verse links well-known Marquette sights to vivid emotional images, and Janeen Rastall, whose *Yellow Dog Year* portrays, in impressionistic flashes, a dispute between spiritual, environmental, and economic interests. The surnames of Saara Myrene Raappana and Jane Piirto reflect the area's Finnish-American loggers and miners, and their poems reflect on their heritage.

Editor Ron Riecki chose his selections well. Some of the more experimental prose poems may be tough sledding for the casual, nonacademic reader, but even they contain interesting views of UP life and culture. If this collection has a fault, it is its over reliance on the kind of inward-focused writing frequently associated with academic creative-writing programs. But this may simply reflect the view that, as Johnson says in his introduction, the UP is "the most intimate landscape I know."

The Way North is a wide-ranging sampler of current Upper Peninsula writing, reflecting many different viewpoints, and an excellent introduction for those who are curious about the UP and its writers.

BRADLEY A. SCOTT (Summer 2013)

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