

# Appalachia

---

Volume 73  
Number 1 *Winter/Spring 2022: Cataclysms in  
the Catskills and Taconics*

---

Article 25

2021

## Returning the Gift

John Smelcer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/appalachia>



Part of the [Poetry Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Smelcer, John (2021) "Returning the Gift," *Appalachia*: Vol. 73 : No. 1 , Article 25.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/appalachia/vol73/iss1/25>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by Dartmouth Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Appalachia by an authorized editor of Dartmouth Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [dartmouthdigitalcommons@groups.dartmouth.edu](mailto:dartmouthdigitalcommons@groups.dartmouth.edu).

---

---

## Returning the Gift

All summer, I have been feeding a raven  
who comes to the river asking for salmon.

For weeks, we talk of the origin of things  
while I cut fish to dry in the sun.

Months later, when geese fly overhead  
in long, slow arrows, I am lost moose hunting.

When night falls upon its dark knees and the moon  
is a fingernail at the rim of the world,

I listen to tight-stringed wind  
from inside my fluttering tent, and by morning,

in a shudder, the world is wintered.  
Quietly, through the gray wolf of the north

I watch the raven arrive to lead me from the forest,  
tree by tree, until I am home and we speak for the last time.

Tsin'aen, Saghani Ggaay. Tsin'aen.  
"Thank you, Great Raven. Thank you."

As he flies toward far ochre mountains,  
I can hear him singing and singing.

*John Smelcer*

---

---

JOHN SMELCER'S 50 books include his poetry book *Indian Giver* (Leapfrog, 2016) and *The Raven and the Totem* (Leapfrog Press, 2019). He is the last living member of the Ahtna tribe of Alaska who can read, write, and speak in their severely endangered language.

---

---

*“I started reading Appalachia for the accident reports, but I kept reading for the great features.”—Mohamed Ellozy, subscriber*

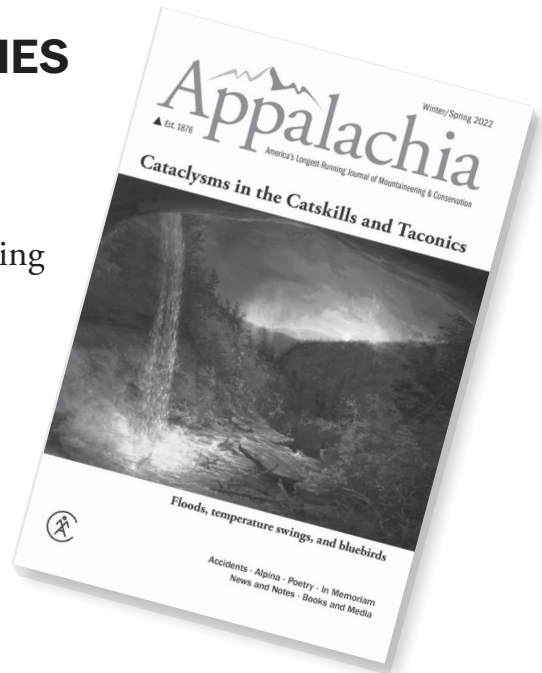
---

---

## SUPPORT THE STORIES YOU LOVE!

Start or renew your *Appalachia* subscription today, and keep reading America’s longest-running journal of mountaineering and conservation.

Visit [outdoors.org/appalachia](https://outdoors.org/appalachia) for a special offer: 36% off the journal’s cover price. That’s three years of *Appalachia* (6 issues) for only \$42. Or choose a one-year subscription (2 issues) for \$18—18% off the cover price.



Inside every issue, you’ll find:

- inspired writing on mountain exploration, adventurers, ecology, and conservation
- up-to-date news and notes on international expeditions
- analysis of recent Northeastern mountaineering accidents
- book reviews, poetry, and much more

Subscribe today at [outdoors.org/appalachia](https://outdoors.org/appalachia) or call 800-372-1758.



Subscription prices valid as of September 2021. Prices and offers subject to change without notice. For the most up-to-date information, visit [outdoors.org](https://outdoors.org).