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Fellowship: Rural Witness
(Community witness book project)



The world cracks with loneliness, meanness, deep fakes — and like so many others, my soul bruises, my humanity fumbles. But my creative spirit stubbornly keeps seeing opportunities Everywhere.

Living in a remote and isolated landscape, dependence on each other is critical. And yet, trust is evaporating. These are people who have lived side by side for decades, done life together. And yet, for all we share in common, we now avoid eye contact and conversation.

I want to witness the full humanity of anyone willing to tell me their stories and their sacred values. And then, I want to be a sort of literary sketch artist, representing them on the page with all their dignity, humanity, uniqueness, and voice — absent hot-takery or cliche or preaching.

The lack of this kind of listening has probably de-humanized our national and global common life. I don't know how to undo it out there. I don't really know how to undo it in my town either. But I do have a vision for how to begin undoing it in me. And maybe that will help with all the rest.

At the end of this I hope to craft — and then gift to them — a kind of love letter, in the form of a beautiful, limited print run book. A love letter to our closely observed, interconnected humanity in this particular place and time.



It has occurred to me that what I need is a discipline, a creative one, to soothe my soul and steady my humanity. It needs to be small. But more radically, it needs to help me love my neighbors.

In many places, love of neighbor will mean getting groceries, helping with the electric bill. In my context, though, while my neighbors may *need* that, they will hardly ever *accept* it. They are financially poor but richly self-sufficient, arrogantly independent but humbly hard-working. They are people of the fading rural American West.

There are glimmers of hope. Over the past year, I've worked at our town library. I have seen cowboys and atheists, progressives and conservatives, young and old, all get equally frustrated by a copier jam, or curious about the metal detectors for check out, or worried about wildfires. Bits of their stories leak out over the months. I've started to fall in love with all of them, begun to feel like labels are the least interesting things about us.

