Afternoon Discoveries: October 30, 2026

Nonfiction, Memoir, Essays, & Narrative Journalism

AMONG THE LETTERS
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Nonfiction, Memoir, Essays, & Narrative Journalism

A painter starts over at seventy-five in Victoria, and a daughter rides beside her father along China's border with North Korea. Today's nonfiction comes from Substack writers, small magazines, and Canadian publications such as Hazlitt, Geist, The Local, and CBC Books. In the paid section, a Toronto reporter tours dead malls, a Norwegian traces an eight-point star, and two

Montrealers learn to keep goats. The back shelf brings memoir craft, a Victorian lecture on chalk, and a settler's letter about Ontario wildflowers. Each piece pays close attention to what lasts.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on October 30, 2026.

Featured Discovery

In Age I Bud Again - Rona Maynard

Rona Maynard, the former editor of Chatelaine, grew up wary of her father, the painter Max Maynard, whose drinking and rages ruled the house. After the divorce, he settled into one faded room in Victoria and began sketching the driftwood along Dallas Road at seventy-five. Years later, with her own memoir selling slowly, a friend sent her back to George Herbert's poem "The Flower." Its line about budding again in age returned her father to her. This honest essay from her Substack, Amazement Seeker, asks what failure really means.

Read "In Age I Bud Again" at Amazement Seeker

The Discovery Desk

Road Trip at the Borderland - Aube Rey Lescure

When her father proposes a drive to see fall colours along the Yalu River, Aube Rey Lescure has doubts. Neither of them can really drive, he is one month past cancer surgery, and they have barely spoken in years. Her thrifty grandmother rides in the back seat, propped on three pillows, as the new car heads toward the border with North Korea. Earlier, at a hospital in Shanghai, her father introduced her to his doctor as his niece. This Longreads original is funny and tender, and its final hospital scene lands beautifully.

Read “Road Trip at the Borderland” at Longreads

Let’s Get Lost - Valerie Monroe

At seventy-five, Valerie Monroe boarded a Tokyo train with no idea where she was going, and she did it on purpose. Since 2022 she has spent each spring and fall in the city near her son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter, with Manhattan as her other home. Her first trip to Japan, decades earlier, left her feeling clumsy and unwelcome. In this essay for Oldster Magazine, a Substack about growing older, she describes learning to wander with a phone translator and a little mime. Her quiet independence is contagious.

Read “Let’s Get Lost” at Oldster Magazine

Cricket in the GTA Is Booming. Now Comes the Hard Part. - Vikram Nijhawan

On a Sunday morning in Brampton, captain Tausif Shaikh runs practice for the Toronto Peshwas, a recreational team whose players range from

their twenties to past fifty. Cricket was once Canada's national sport, and new arrivals from South Asia have made it one of the country's fastest-growing games again. Vikram Nijhawan reports for The Local, a Toronto magazine, on what that growth has brought. Fields are overbooked, private training centres are closing, and corruption allegations have reached the national level. It is a lively portrait of a community and its game.

Read "Cricket in the GTA Is Booming" at The Local

Acoustic Memory - Ernie Kroeger

Ernie Kroeger grew up on Valour Road in Winnipeg's West End, in a Mennonite home where German, Low German, and scraps of Russian filled the rooms. His grandmother played Chopin on the piano while gas hissed from cylinders at the factory across the street. In this essay for Geist, a Vancouver magazine, he wonders whether sounds heard in the womb shape a lifetime of listening. He recalls a junk collector's horse, a sparrow trapped in the chimney, and a teacher who called his umlaut an omelette. Even his tinnitus becomes part of the music.

Read "Acoustic Memory" at Geist

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon's edition. Below this point are six more essays and reports on memory, home, and family, three pieces on the craft of memoir, and three special recommendations from the back shelf.

Special Recommendations can be found near the bottom of the article.

More From the Discovery Desk

The Dead Mall Society - Lana Hall

A man named Aryeh, wearing a cap with a propeller on top, leads a rented school bus from downtown Toronto to the suburbs, where nearly abandoned malls wait in limbo. His group, Liminal Assembly, tours these places for people who grew up on food courts and Orange Julius. Toronto journalist Lana Hall joins a tour that includes a dry fountain, a silent walk to orchestral music, and payphones with real phone books. She also explains why so many malls stall between demolition and redevelopment. This Hazlitt feature is wistful, funny, and slightly eerie.

Read “The Dead Mall Society” at Hazlitt

Born in 1885 - Kim van Alkemade

At twelve, Kim van Alkemade sat on her grandparents’ plastic-covered sofa in New Jersey while her great-grandmother Fannie told stories. After Fannie’s husband abandoned the family in 1918, she placed her three sons in the Hebrew Orphan Asylum in Manhattan and took a job there as a matron. For twelve years she saw her own boys only during Sunday visiting hours. Decades later, a search through the orphanage’s archives turned those memories into a bestselling novel. This Oldster Magazine essay honours the long-lived women who made it possible.

Read “Born in 1885” at Oldster Magazine

Rose, Snowflake, Star, Sun - Jessica Furseth

When Jessica Furseth chose a tattoo to honour her grandmother, a gifted knitter, she picked the Selburose, the eight-point star found on Norwegian mittens. Her tattoo artist in London, who came from Lithuania, recognized it at once as a Baltic symbol. That surprise set her tracing the star through Islamic stucco in Iraq, Peruvian textiles, and a Mi'kmaq rock carving. In the village of Selbu, she learns how a teenage milkmaid knit the first rose mittens in the 1850s. This Hazlitt essay is a warm piece of cultural detective work.

Read "Rose, Snowflake, Star, Sun" at Hazlitt

Dummies Raising Goats - Madeleine Pelletier

Madeleine Pelletier said yes before the seller even finished asking whether the new owners would keep the goats. Two months later, she and her boyfriend, city people from Montreal, had an eighty-five-year-old farmhouse in southern Quebec, six goats, and a copy of Raising Goats for Dummies. The book could not explain why a supposed male named Caper peed like a girl. Udders swelled, a goat named Oliver ate the grapevines, and a neighbour's goat came courting. Pelletier's short Geist essay is a delight from start to finish.

Read "Dummies Raising Goats" at Geist

Clearing Out My Mother's House - Rose Divecha

Rose Divecha's mother, Josephine, was difficult, frugal, and always ready for the next emergency. When she died in October 2019, she left a four-bedroom house stocked with batteries, canned goods, surgical masks, and toilet paper. Months later, as Divecha sorted it all, the pandemic her mother had prepared for arrived. A neighbour's kind phone call about the recycling finally let her set some of the weight

down. Divecha, who lives in Hamilton, Ontario, keeps only a few things, and this Geist essay explains each one.

Read “Clearing Out My Mother’s House” at Geist

Bad Faith - Kristina Kasparian

Kristina Kasparian and her husband, Ethan, chose surrogacy after her illness made carrying a pregnancy unsafe. Their first surrogate set rules that kept changing, and her expense claims later turned out to include wine, candy, and three-hundred-dollar slippers. Then their son, Finn, was stillborn, and his hospital chart left no trace of his mother. Written in the second person, this essay by a Montreal writer was a finalist for the 2026 CBC Nonfiction Prize. It is painful to read, yet its final word, maybe, carries real hope.

Read “Bad Faith” at CBC Books

Beyond the First Shelf

How to Use Your Old Journals - Brenden O’Donnell

Brenden O’Donnell has kept every journal he ever filled, from moleskins to legal pads, and opened them exactly zero times. When he finally reread a few, he found thoughtful reflection but nothing that sparked new work. A notebook from a summer workshop proved different,

yielding twenty-two essay ideas in one sitting. In this post for The Brevity Blog, he explains why, then offers a simple method for reading old pages with present questions in mind. Any memoirist with a dusty shelf of notebooks will find it useful.

Read “How to Use Your Old Journals” at The Brevity Blog

Pretending to Be Tony Shalhoub: On Co-Writing a Book in My Father’s Voice - Josie Adams

Josie Adams spent a year writing as her father, the actor Tony Shalhoub, best known as the detective Adrian Monk. Their book is a culinary memoir about his childhood in a Lebanese American family of ten children in Green Bay, Wisconsin. In this essay for Literary Hub, Adams explains how they shared the work, with him drafting stories and her shaping them. She also reflects on how strange it felt to type the words my mother about a grandmother she never met. One passage she wrote for that grandmother made her father cry.

Read “Pretending to Be Tony Shalhoub” at Literary Hub

Interview: Judy Sandler, Author of What Kind of Mother: A Reckoning - Nina B. Lichtenstein with Judy Sandler

Judy Sandler’s debut memoir follows her son’s adolescent substance use and later severe mental illness, and her slow acceptance that she could not save him. In this Hippocampus Magazine conversation, Nina B. Lichtenstein asks how a family story became a story of the writer’s own change. Sandler credits the teaching of Elissa Altman for helping her stay on her side of the story. She also describes how her son once

asked an editor to remove an early essay, and how years of sharing drafts changed that. The interview is generous and practical.

Read “Interview: Judy Sandler” at Hippocampus Magazine

Special Recommendations

A Chapter on Dreams - Robert Louis Stevenson

Robert Louis Stevenson begins with a dreamer who, as a student in Edinburgh, began dreaming in sequence and so led a double life, one by day and one by night. Later, writing for money, that dreamer found his sleep supplied by the Brownies, little people who staged stories in the small theatre of the brain. Stevenson finally admits the dreamer is himself. He credits the Brownies with key scenes of Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. This 1888 essay on where stories come from remains a delight.

Read “A Chapter on Dreams” at Project Gutenberg

On a Piece of Chalk - Thomas Henry Huxley

In 1868, Thomas Henry Huxley gave this lecture to working men in Norwich, a city built over a great bed of chalk. He starts with the bit of chalk every carpenter carries in his pocket and shows that it is made largely of tiny shells called Globigerina. Similar shells came up in mud

dredged from the Atlantic floor while engineers prepared the telegraph cable. From there he reads the white cliffs as the record of an ancient sea. It remains a model of science writing for everyone.

Read “On a Piece of Chalk” at Project Gutenberg

The Backwoods of Canada, Letter XIV - Catharine Parr Traill

In July 1834, Catharine Parr Traill wrote home to her mother in England from a log house near Peterborough in Upper Canada. She regretted skipping her mother’s lessons in flower painting, so she described the wildflowers in words instead. Her letter notes how fireweed springs up wherever land has been burned, then turns to water lilies, wild rice beds, scarlet columbine, ferns, and blue-eyed grass. Traill became one of Canada’s first important botanical writers. The letter reflects the settler outlook and language of its time.

Read “Letter XIV” at Project Gutenberg

Thank you for spending part of your day among the letters with us.

Many of today’s pieces are about paying attention later than we meant to. A daughter rides beside a father she barely knows, a painter starts over at seventy-five, and a writer finally rereads his old notebooks. Others keep watch over an orphanage, empty malls, a farmhouse, and a field of wildflowers. Good nonfiction gives those moments a second chance to be seen. We hope a few of these pages keep you company this weekend.

I hope one of today’s pieces gives you somewhere worth staying for a while.

Take care!