Afternoon Discoveries: November 13, 2026

Nonfiction, Memoir, Essays, & Narrative Journalism.

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

Friday brings true stories told close to the bone. A daughter shells pecans after hospice, a reporter watches Arctic sea ice thin, and a girl named Dixin answers to Dixon for years. Today's pieces come from Hippocampus Magazine, Brevity, Longreads, and Hakai Magazine, a coastal publication from British Columbia. Further in, a trucker sings on a jammed Houston

interstate, and a young hiker learns to fear and love desert canyons. The back shelf offers essays on feeling and revision, a questionnaire, and three classics on walking, hating, and judging others.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on November 13, 2026.

Featured Discovery

Paper Shell - Amanda Ashworth

Mama's house in rural Tennessee was flanked by pecan trees, and one of them dropped the thin paper shells she prized for her famous pies. When hospice came, she refused an aide until Lynn arrived, a calm presence who gathered pecans on slow walks and saved some for a secret pet squirrel named Lucky. Amanda Ashworth, an English teacher and writer, sets her mother's last autumn among the quiet rituals of a Southern household. Small details carry the grief, from plastic fishing worms to an early Christmas tree. The final line about pie lands softly and stays.

Read "Paper Shell" at Hippocampus Magazine

The Discovery Desk

The Mole - Courtney Cheng

A mole above Courtney Cheng's lip passed from her maternal grandfather to her mother to her, and her parents always called it bad luck. She refused removal at eight, at twenty-three, and again when a wedding makeup artist tried to cover it. At a great-aunt's funeral in Vancouver, she realized the mole was one of her few links to family in Taiwan. At thirty-one she finally said yes, with her own wedding photos in mind. Cheng, a Bay Area native now living in Dallas, writes about vanity and inheritance with honesty and humour.

Read "The Mole" at Hippocampus Magazine

The Name They Gave Me - Angela Edward

Her name is Dixin, one half chosen by her father and the other half, meaning dawn light, chosen by her mother. On her first day of school, a teacher read it as Dixon, and at five she simply nodded because she wanted to be easy. Strangers soon asked her mother how old her son was, and later her father chose the English name Angela. In this Brevity essay, Angela Edward traces how a name can slip away through politeness. Her quiet ending, about hearing that name said correctly, feels like a homecoming.

Read "The Name They Gave Me" at Brevity

Ice Loss - Ravenna Koenig

In 2018, Ravenna Koenig left a producing job at NPR in Washington for a one-year reporting post in Fairbanks, Alaska, covering energy and the environment. Her work took her to Utqiaġvik, the northernmost community in the country, where the sea ice that once protected the shore was forming later and melting earlier. At the same time, a long-distance relationship was slipping out of her hands. This Longreads personal essay braids climate reporting with private grief and asks how anyone faces a disappearing world. Its closing scene on a Pacific Northwest beach is clear-eyed and generous.

Read “Ice Loss” at Longreads

The Canoe in the Forest - Joshua Hunt

Deep in the forest of Prince of Wales Island in southeast Alaska lies a cedar canoe, carved roughly 140 years ago in the spot where its tree fell. Journalist Joshua Hunt, who has Tlingit heritage, travels from Tokyo to see it with Stormy Hamar, a Haida carver in a woven cedar bark hat. Their rough trek opens into a story about lost carving knowledge, logging lands, and a project to document the canoe in 3D. Hakai Magazine, a coastal science and society publication from British Columbia, ran this feature. It is patient, curious, and beautifully reported.

Read “The Canoe in the Forest” at Hakai Magazine

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon’s edition. Below this point are six more true stories of family, weather, and the open road, three pieces on craft and the writing life, and three classic essays from the back shelf.

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

More From the Discovery Desk

Ten and Two - Sabrina Hicks

A doctor tells Sabrina Hicks and her mother that Alzheimer's is just a name, and Hicks wonders whether diseases should be named like hurricanes. Moments earlier, her mother, an athlete and a fighter, froze while trying to draw clock hands at ten minutes to two. The essay moves through memory tests and a Westminster chime clock her mother once gave as a housewarming gift. That clock came with a rule that its hands only move forward. Hicks, an Arizona writer, turns that rule into a gentle and devastating meditation on time.

Read "Ten and Two" at Hippocampus Magazine

Midwinter Distraction - Michelle Menting

In the thick of a Maine February, Michelle Menting shovels twelve-foot swaths around her house and wonders why she pushes away something that softens all the noise. Her mind drifts to northern Wisconsin childhood winters, when she and her sisters froze dyed water in cottage cheese tubs to build rainbow ice castles. Summer memories follow, including buckets of panfish left out for raccoons on the same picnic table. Menting, the youngest of twelve siblings and a small-town library director, writes with a poet's ear. Her final plan involves candles and ice.

Read "Midwinter Distraction" at Hippocampus Magazine

Rush - Phin Johnson

A boy huddles under a rock ledge high on a desert canyon bank as rain and hail fall, bored and eager to keep moving. Then comes a roar like a train, and a wall of brown floodwater bursts around the bend carrying logs and bushes. Phin Johnson, an English student at the University of Utah, follows that boy into adulthood, where every dark cloud brings a jolt of panic. Still he keeps returning to the narrow canyons he loves. This Hippocampus essay ends where fear and awe become a kind of prayer.

Read “Rush” at Hippocampus Magazine

Kneading - Erin Wood

The first time nurses in a neonatal intensive care unit place her daughter on her chest, Erin Wood feels the tiny body cling to her like dough. Born seventeen weeks early at a pound and a half, the baby was given less than a five percent chance, and her twin brother did not survive. Wood builds the whole essay from the language of baking, from a boule in the rain to sheets of phyllo. She owns and runs Et Alia Press and edited an anthology about scars. This Brevity piece is short, exact, and full of hard-won hope.

Read “Kneading” at Brevity

Bad Apple - Michael Singleton

Traffic on I-10 into Houston stops dead one Monday morning, and the CB radio fills with truckers trading routes and rumours. Then a voice calling himself Bad Apple starts singing a raunchy song he says took

five states and a failed marriage to write. Michael Singleton, who spent thirty years in technology before driving trucks, captures a roadside congregation of strangers held together by heat and boredom. He never even sees the singer's truck. This Brevity essay is funny, warm, and a fine study of voice.

Read "Bad Apple" at Brevity

Crone - Sofie Wicklund

You are a young woman at a late summer dinner party on a farm, half in love with the hostess who lives alone and stands solid on the earth. The man you expect to marry lectures the other guests on inflation and calls her life lonely. Sofie Wicklund, an MFA student in St. Paul, Minnesota, steps back from the party to trace the long history of women pushed to the edge of the village. Those women became midwives, healers, and herbalists. The essay's second-person ending imagines a long table of your own.

Read "Crone" at Hippocampus Magazine

Beyond the First Shelf

Emotional Texture: One of the Most Powerful Tools in Any Writer's Toolbox - Chelene Knight

On a walk through her neighbourhood, Chelene Knight fell for two little attic rooms on a corner house, then learned they were decorative dormers built to create a feeling. In this Hippocampus craft essay, she uses that discovery to explain emotional texture and how writers earn a reader's trust. Her central image is a puzzle with one piece always missing, held in the reader's own hand. Knight, whose memoir Dear Current Occupant won the Vancouver Book Award, now mentors MFA students in Halifax. The essay is practical and warm.

Read "Emotional Texture" at Hippocampus Magazine

Play it in Reverse: Defamiliarization as a Revision Strategy - Amanda Rizkalla

As a kid, Amanda Rizkalla played songs backwards hoping to hear secret messages and found a strange second song instead. Years later, after revising her debut novel so often that she had memorized it, she needed a way to see the manuscript anew. In this Brevity Blog guest post, she shares four strategies, beginning with revising sections out of order. Each one changes how a writer handles a draft that has grown too familiar. Memoirists and novelists alike will find something to try this weekend.

Read "Play it in Reverse" at The Brevity Blog

The Longreads Questionnaire, Featuring Jasper Craven - Brendan Fitzgerald with Jasper Craven

Jasper Craven is a freelance reporter who has built a beat where masculinity meets the American military, once spending six months undercover at a private security firm for Harper's. In this Longreads Questionnaire, introduced by Brendan Fitzgerald, he answers short

questions about home, influences, and working habits. He names a Vermont athenaeum and a Brooklyn diner among the places that feel like home. His time capsule list is sharp and very funny. It is a quick, lively portrait of a working journalist.

Read “The Longreads Questionnaire, Featuring Jasper Craven” at Longreads

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Special Recommendations

Walking Tours - Robert Louis Stevenson

Robert Louis Stevenson insists that a walking tour should be taken alone, at your own pace, with no companion chattering at your elbow. He praises the open road for the freedom it gives the mind, then saves his best pages for the evening at the inn, with tired legs, a pipe, and a book. First published in 1876 and later collected in Virginibus Puerisque, the essay warmly quotes William Hazlitt on going a journey. Its mood is easy and companionable. The final line sends you into some different parish of the infinite.

Read “Walking Tours” at Wikisource

On the Pleasure of Hating - William Hazlitt

William Hazlitt begins by sparing a spider that crawls across the matting of his room, then admits that his gentleness hides an older appetite. Hatred, he argues, is a pleasure people seek out, from public quarrels to rivalries among friends. He turns the argument on old loves too, including books and friendships that have soured. Collected in The Plain Speaker in 1826, the essay is witty, bitter, and uncomfortably honest. Its last sentence is one of the great turns in English prose.

Read “On the Pleasure of Hating” at Wikisource

Of Cannibals - Michel de Montaigne

Michel de Montaigne opens with King Pyrrhus admiring a Roman army that the Greeks would have called barbarian. Drawing on a man in his household who lived for years in Brazil, he describes the customs of the people there and turns the charge of savagery back on Europe. Everyone, he suggests, calls barbarism whatever is not the custom of their own country. This version is Charles Cotton’s seventeenth-century English translation. Its famous closing line about breeches still lands with a sly grin.

Read “Of Cannibals” at Wikisource

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

Many of today’s pieces are about what we keep as other things slip away. A daughter bakes her mother’s pecan pie, a writer reclaims her first name, and a reporter holds on to the memory of a frozen sea. Others find company in unlikely places, from a CB radio to a farm table. True stories often work this way, setting small details against large losses. We hope a few of these essays stay with you through the weekend.

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

Take care!