

Hi, I'm Matt O'Donnell editor of Bowdoin Magazine. I'm sitting in my backyard in my writing cabin, which has a fun Bowdoin history and connection. It was a writing cabin of Lawrence Sargeant Hall of Bowdoin class of 1936, who was an English professor at the College for some 40 years. He converted a codfishdrying shack on Orr's island into his writing cabin sometime shortly after World War II and wrote in this space for about 50 years. On the desk that I'm sitting at, in fact, is where he wrote a couple of pretty famous pieces, a short story called "The Ledge," that won an O. Henry and that John Updike included in the anthology the "Hundred Best Short Stories of the 20th Century." And Hall also wrote a novel called "Stowaway" that won the...it was the 1961 Faulkner Award. I came to own the cabin in 2003 and moved it to my house.

And I've recently completed a top to bottom renovation on it that I'm pretty excited about, helped early on by Jeff Tillinghast of the Bowdoin class of 2004 and Adam Tinker of the class of 2013. And here's just a quick little tour. The cabin is only 6 x 10. Just has a little wood stove, place to sit, to think, a little desk to write. So I thought it would be a good place to read from today.

Here, I'm going to read from "The Book of Delights" by Ross Gay, which is one of my favorite books of the past few years. And it came out two years ago, I think. And about three years ago, Ross read at Bowdoin. He's read at Bowdoin a couple of times, and the last time he read, he read a little bit from this collection before they came out, which was fun to hear. Ross wrote little essayettes, little poetic lyrical essays one day for a year, and then collected his favorites in this.

And it's a poignant book anyway, but even more so in the past year, because it's a book that celebrates each of the essays and celebrates a little joy in life. And it's easy to lose track in the past year of those little joys. And I think it's all the more important to dig around for them and recognize them.

So this is "Joy Number 60," dated April 7th.

Joy is such a human madness, the duff between us. Or like this: in healthy forests, which we might imagine to exist mostly above ground and be wrong in our imagining, given as the bulk of the tree, the roots, are reaching through the earth below, there exists a constant communication between those roots and mycelium, where often the ill or weak or stressed are supported by the strong and surplussed. By which I mean a tree over there needs nitrogen and a nearby tree has extra.

So the hyphae, so close to hyphen, the handshake of the punctuation world, the fungal ambulances ferry it over. Constantly. This tree to that, that to this. And that in this tablespoon of rich fungal duff, a delight, the phrase fungal duff, meaning the healthy forest soil swirling with the living the dead make. Are miles and miles of hyphae handshakes who get a little sugar for their work. The pronoun who turned the mushrooms into people. Yes, it did. Evolved the people into mushrooms.

Because in trying to articulate what, perhaps, joy is, it has occurred to me that among other things, the trees and the mushrooms have shown me this, joy is the mostly invisible, the underground union between us, you and me, which is among other things, the great fact of our life and the lives of everyone and thing we love going away. If we sink a spoon into that fact, into the duff between us, we will find it teeming. It will look like all the books ever written. It will look like all the nerves in a body. We might call it

sorrow, but we might call it a union. One that once we notice it, once we bring it into the light, might become flower, and food might be joy.

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