

# TAKE HEART

## A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,  
Maine Poet Laureate*

Jim Thatcher lives and writes in Yarmouth. In today's poem he tells the story of a hermit who was found outside his shack, and of the contents that were found inside it.

### Understory

*by Jim Glenn Thatcher*

The old man had always been a mystery,  
living out there on that abandoned logging road  
in those miles of woods between the Parsonsfields.  
Months would go by without anyone seeing him.  
No one even noticed when he first went missing.  
Gone for all of seven seasons before a hunter found him –  
not in those open pine woods where they'd sometimes  
seen him ranging, but tangled beneath the understory  
less than a hundred yards behind his shack.  
Stripped down to rags on a skeleton, bedded  
in spears of burdock; ribs twined with creeper;  
his skull filled now with the strangeness of other life,  
the sun tracking its daily course of shadow and light  
along the brow of the caves where his eyes had been.

When they went in to clean out his shack,  
not expecting much—a rotting cot,  
a very old sleeping bag, some utensils, one cup.  
it was the notebooks that surprised them.  
Piles upon piles of old notebooks, all of them full –  
“Crawling with words,” someone said. A library of wildness –  
Journal entries that seemed written by the forest itself,  
the woods he lived in become the woods living in him.  
Passages of a feral intelligence hedging off into its hinterlands –  
Stories of stones, autobiographies of oaks and maples,  
a runic hand-scrrawl scratching itself into granite,  
sand, leaf, bough, fin, fur, feather, claw,  
the commonality of bark and blood and bone –  
Histories of a self gone Other...

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