

prised to see us. There were very few people who were our age. But everybody was so wonderful and so helpful that we never felt that people looked down on us. We felt that we were all in the same situation together and very supportive of each other.

DW: Aspen, you describe your mother's reaction when you told her about the sexual assault you experienced in college, and she was justifiably horrified. I would also think she would have been really scared to find out that you were going to go on the PCT solo.

AM: They were horrified and upset. There were lots of conditions, like I had to carry a satellite telephone and call them every night and give them my GPS coordinates so they would know my latitude and longitude. They were still supportive, though. I think that's partly because I had already walked 1,000 miles alone on the PCT. They knew I could do it. I had proven myself. I was so unhappy. I could not stay at the school. My parents didn't think I should stay there either.

DW: For you, it sounds like it had a real healing power. If you're in the right head space for it, you can find redemption, but also learn more about one's inner working because there's so much contemplative time. Is that how it functioned for you?

AM: In my mind, there are two types of people who are walking from Mexico to Canada. There are people who are trying to overcome something. They have a problem, like a rape, and they're trying to find their place. The other type of person, like Justin (her hiking partner on the trail and her former husband), is not walking to find their place in the world; they're walking because they do not believe a place for them exists in this world. It's a pause button. It's not a solution.

GS: At its deepest level, the hike of the Pacific Crest Trail was a pilgrimage. It was a way of walking into the question, "Who am I?" I feel I lived through that question. Porter walked deeper and deeper into it with me. Now, I feel that that question continues. It's very alive for me. It continues as the book takes its own journey in the world.

Something that has been a very welcome surprise is that so many people are responding to that question, "Who am I?" It's not a question to be answered. It's a question to be lived. It's a mystery to be lived on a daily basis. Our profound relationship with the natural world helps us live that mystery.

DW: Sometimes the Pacific Crest Trail can't bear the expectations that we put on it.

AM: It's not about what the Pacific Crest Trail can handle. It's about what you want and whether or not it's realistic. I wanted to become empowered. I felt disempowered. In the beginning, I didn't truly know why I was walking. I thought I wanted to be alone. What I really wanted was to put myself in a dangerous situation, and for nothing bad to happen, and to prove and prove again that people are good and the world is safe.

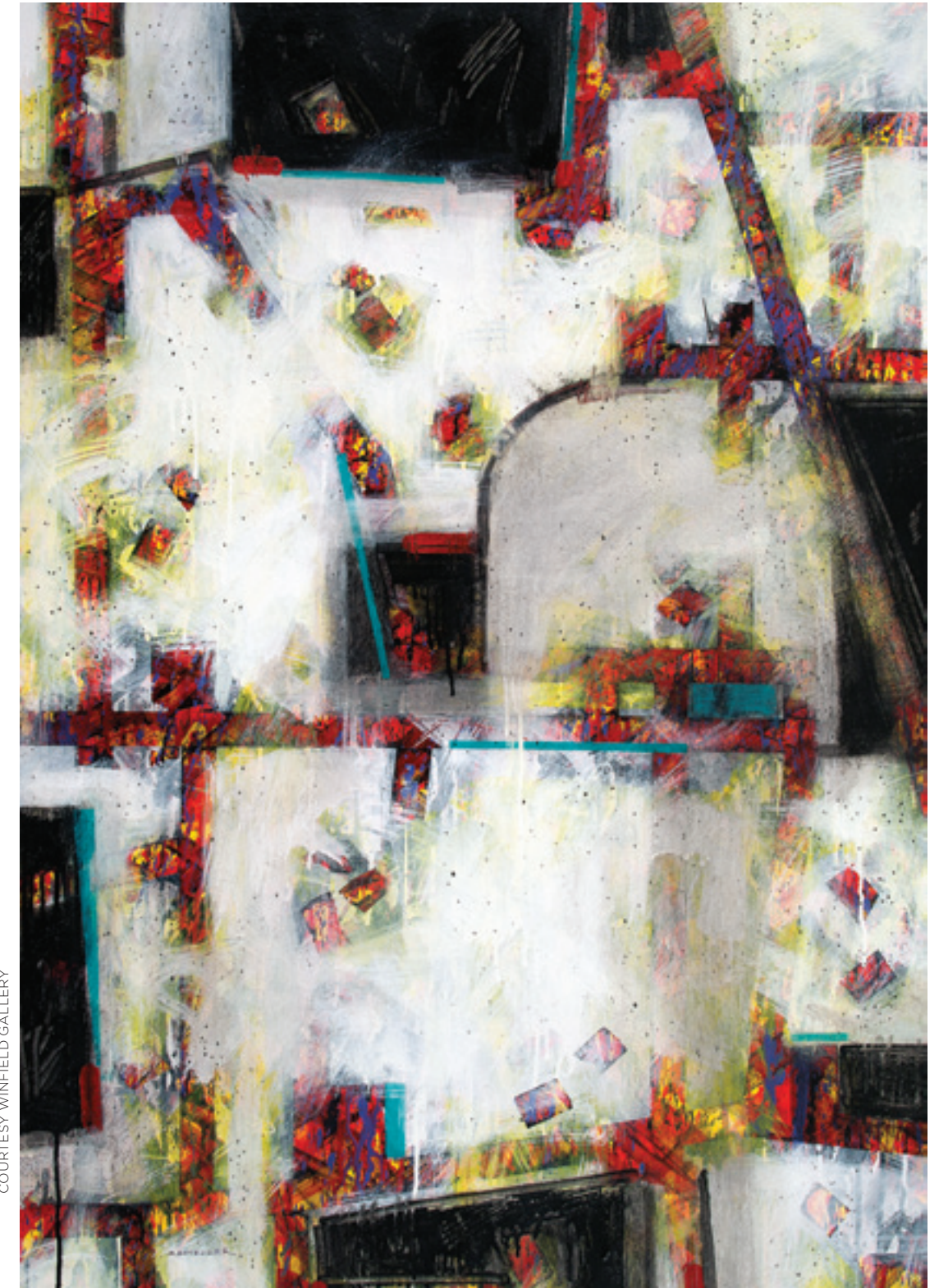
Aspen Matis's work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Tin House*, and elsewhere. She is the author of the memoir *Girl in the Woods*, forthcoming from HarperCollins April 2015.

Gail D. Storey is the author of *I Promise Not to Suffer: A Fool for Love Hikes the Pacific Crest Trail*, Winner of the National Outdoor Book Award, Foreword IndieFab Book of the Year Award, Colorado Book Award, Nautilus Silver Award, and Barbara Savage Award from Mountaineers Books. Her first novel, *The Lord's Motel*, was praised by the *New York Times Book Review* as "a tale of unwise judgments and wise humor." Her second novel, *God's Country Club*, was a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Selection.

Dan White's second nonfiction book, *Soaked to the Bone*, which he describes as "an embodied history of American camping," is set to be published in 2016 by Henry Holt & Co. His first book, *The Cactus Eaters*, (HarperCollins) was an indie bookstore bestseller and a *Los Angeles Times* "Discovery" selection. He was a Steinbeck Fellow at San Jose State University in 2007-8.

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Mixed Media and Oil on Canvas, 39.5 x 27.5 in



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