

mamalode[®]

the sky's the limit
MONTANA

The sky's the limit.



Hidden Lake, Glacier National Park



"You can read about a place. You can look at pictures of it. But unless you've been there and walked it, and felt it, it's not the same. When you travel, you take that back with you, and it's with you for the rest of your life."

Professional landscape painter Dennis Farris had been dreaming of Montana for a long time when he finally arrived in Glacier National Park. He absorbed the majesty of the place, captured it on his canvas and returned home a little bit more alive.

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MONTANA

OH, MONTANA, OUR MONTANA

Imagine us standing on a desk, declaring our love and allegiance.

We have each lived in other places, all are stunning and inspiring. But **MONTANA** is where we landed, where we birthed our children and this business, **mamalode**—all deliberate choices.

We are proud of **mamalode**, of the team who started a national movement that trickles down all sides like water off the Continental Divide. We know that to start a business and grow organically, authentically, always people first—could only have happened here. We put the boots in boot-strapped and stomped all over the world, sharing stories and hearts.

We are also proud of the childhood our kids are having. Here, they are growing up with joy, mountains, lakes, fields, rivers and profound friendships.

MONTANA, she has gumption and a certain ability to look beyond limitations and horizons. It might be that big sky that stretches us a bit past the edge of what seems possible. There is a certain truth to this place, and that truth is reflected every day in **mamalode** and our kids.

Our **MONTANA** can be your **MONTANA** too. There is more than enough grace, beauty and memories to share. Come visit, grow. Come expand and see what is possible.

Glee & Dion



mamalode

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theme: the sky's the limit

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We change our theme each month.



Brian Powers, a proud father. His daughter is the love of his life and it shows in his work. Brian is an award-winning cinematographer & photographer based out of Missoula, Montana. Clickin' Moms has selected Brian as one of the top 100 photographers worldwide to watch in 2015. Check out more of his amazing work at bpowphoto.com

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dream big...no bigger



mamalode.com

mama says

The Little Magazine That Could

by *elke govertsen* | founder of **mamalode**

This magazine you are reading right now could only have come from Montana.

Once upon a time I had a baby. None of my close friends had babies. They were all in that phase of life where you are thinking about getting a dog but not sure if that is Just Too Much.

I loved that baby more than I knew possible. But with motherhood came a host of mixed feelings—exhaustion, terror, numbness and something akin to buyer’s remorse. Those feelings I kept inside and they threatened to topple me.

I found a group of women all with babies the same ages and we began sharing—the good, the bad, the ugly. It was those honest stories that saved me. Suddenly all of my mixed feelings lost their dynamite. It was all just part of the deal. Hard stuff became funny. Messy emotions were normal. Motherhood was something complex and that somehow made it simple.

I wanted to celebrate those women and thus Mother’s Day Eve® was born—a party just for moms on the night before Mother’s Day. The first year 45 women came together. By year three there were 450. Montana mamas were all in.

I was onto something—these women needed each other’s stories. **mamalode** was born.

Here is the part that is so unique to where we live: I started a magazine with only \$400 and a lot of gumption. Montana is a place where you can try. A place where you can dream big.

Mamalode started as a free, local print magazine in 2009—which is probably the worst business model

at the worst time ever. Our unlikely success has come from our readers—they mailed magazines all over the world to friends or moms or sisters and then those women also wanted Mamalode. Within a year of starting a subscription program we had subscribers in all 50 states and 10 other countries.

Now Mother’s Day Eve® is a trademarked event that has been licensed and celebrated in over 100 communities across North America. Mamalode is read worldwide. Our website has over 4000 stories from over 1000 writers—moms, dads, kids, New York Times Bestsellers, huge bloggers and a merry batch of first time writers. We have 23 print issues and a special anthology just for dads (Dadalode).

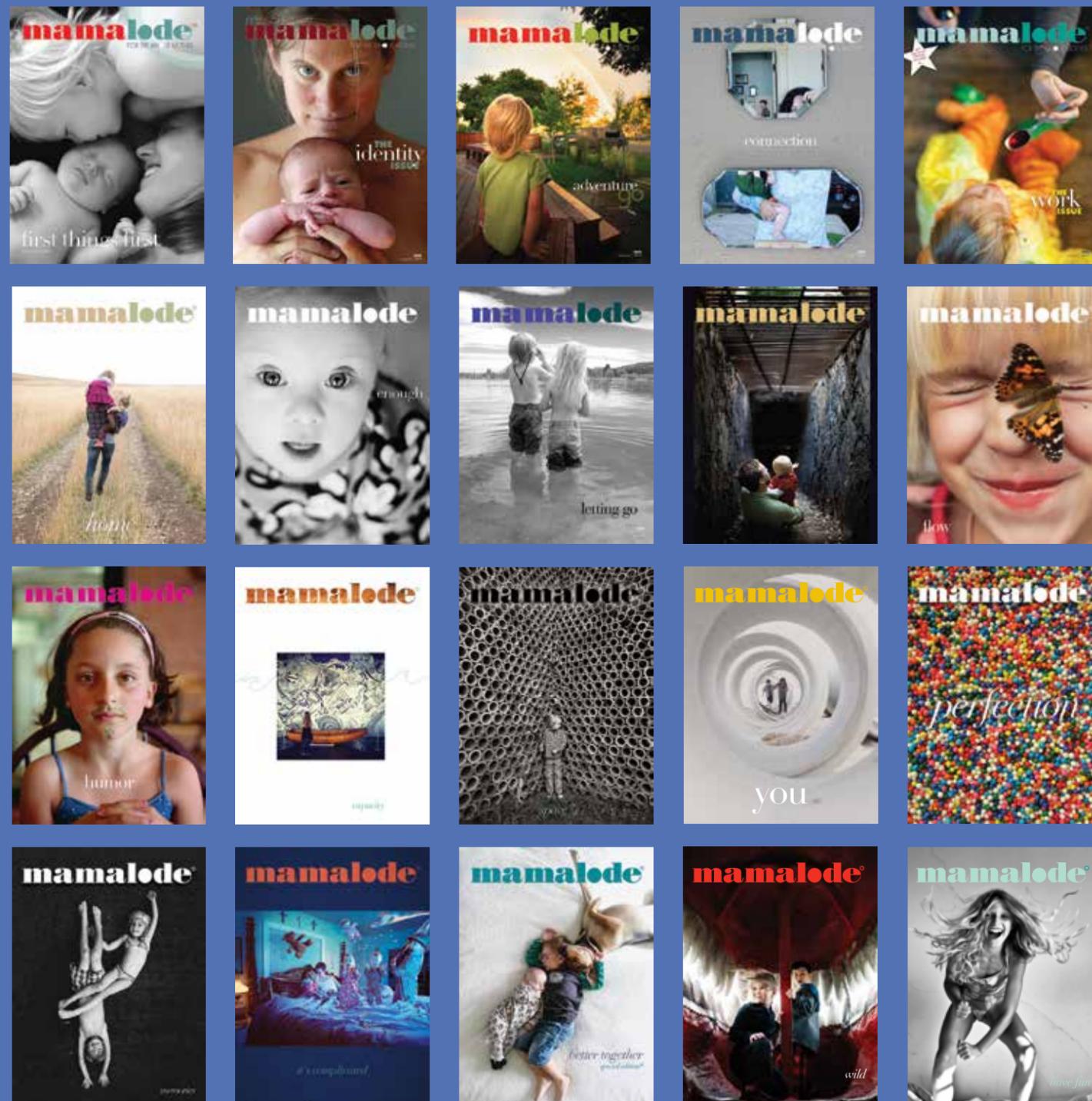
Mamalode’s team has grown too, I have a business partner and a talented group of people pushing us forward. Still based in Montana, we have become a national company with a national audience.

We don’t have staff writers—our stories come from readers. Their stories are the heartbeat of motherhood. Our story is really a fairytale come true—a little magazine that has chugged along the track laid out by our audience. They believe, so we do.

And for me, I now have teenagers and more that \$400 to start something. But I still surround myself with good friend who tell the truth, good neighbors who circle the wagons and always, always good stories. I feel supported and understood, it is the goal of Mamalode to help our readers feel the same.

And Montana is home, heart and why Mamalode has grown. We simply wouldn’t be here without being from here.

Watch out world, this little magazine has big plans. ●



unforgettable

MONTANA

BATHING BOYS

Under sun dappled through leaves she stretches the boy's arm to sponge his shiny skin. He holds stillness between squeezed thighs like a bomb while his four tiny brothers bounce waiting

under the tree. She scrubs fingers and hand to his elbow, across shoulders to his other arm. Her hips shift under her skirt as she wipes clean his neck and back and crack

and down and up again each leg. Eyes, she says, and pours water over his head, slaps his bottom to spark shriek and release to barking dogs. Hand out for another

brave naked son, she jumps the clump and grabs a squealer. Next, she says, and wets him down.

david cates

NOW

I never would have dreamed my life would find me here, following my family up this dusty trail. The arrowleaf balsamroot grows thicker as we head into the trees and the yellow pulses her rhythms of spring. I watch them confident through the spots of light: My daughter's braids burst in the sunshine, sway like Montana wheat, contemplative and reliable while my son flies, knows running is the most dynamic, the most effective way up. My husband dissects the terrain, Lolo Peak to the south, Woody Mountain to the east, the gentle rise of the Rattlesnake Wilderness just beyond us. He knows the name of every path, knows where it leads, and finds the shape and reason behind it all while I just sing songs in my head, the tiny birds flit and float, the wildflowers vibrant. Indian paintbrush and lupine and shooting stars are all ours, all now.

gillian kessler

FROM THE DECK

My mother and I lounge on the deck of our cabin at a lake in the Seeley-Swan drainage. My mother is 87; I am almost 60. Behind us is the cabin that she built with my father in 1953 on a Forest Service lease, digging the road out by hand, living summers in a tent as they built it board by board, stone by stone. I lift binoculars to watch this year's pair of loons circle the lake with their fuzzy brown chick. The male disappears into the green water and reappears, a flashing fish in its black beak that it feeds to its chick, the exchange from beak to beak awkward and thrilling. There is a timelessness here: water sparkles, loons return, tamaracks sway on the pine-scented breeze. This is a site of my earlier sense memory: marshy lake water and pine. It is where I saved my cousin from drowning, launched a hundred fairy boats, brought the man I knew I'd marry, taught my children to fish. It is where I learn, again and again, how time spent around wildlife--loons, crawdads, frogs, beavers, sandhill cranes and great blue herons--connects us to something as essential and mysterious as love.

caroline patterson

THE STORM

I quickly learned to use the blade of my paddle like a rudder to steer the canoe. Six feet ahead of me, my wife sat looking at the herons and osprey that traversed the Upper Missouri. I could hear our teenage kids laughing and telling stories to each other in the canoe behind us.

The shirt on my back was still wet from last night's storms that blew through camp and soaked us all to the bone. The lightning strikes were close; not miles away, but yards. The sky was alive with bursts of light, and thunder shook the valley like a huge drum. Tents went down, poles snapped in the wind and stakes were unable to find purchase in the rain-soaked, sandy ground. This was no ordinary vacation.

The first light of morning found us draping our sleeping bags and belongings on sagebrush to air dry. Later, as we made our way downstream under a beautiful, clear Montana sky, we passed a stand of cottonwoods fully engulfed in flames, the grassland beyond smoldering and burning up the ridge beyond.

We could so easily have opted for another normal family holiday spent in small hotel rooms, or at a relative's house after many hours cramped in a hot car. Not this summer. This summer we stayed closer to home and spent a few days together in the heart of Montana. We went into the storm together, and we came out exhilarated and whole.

leland buck

LOVE

A girl from New York made her way via Colorado. She fell in love almost instantly. There was a different kind of wildness here that made the hair on the back of her neck stand up when she took long runs in the woods. Curious people welcomed her with cookies and green tomato pie. She was introduced and referred and supported. It wasn't easy to find her niche, but when she did, she dug her heels in and called it home. She met the love of her life at an iconic establishment, just as the snow began to fall high up in the mountains. He was drawn to this place for many of the same reasons. They wed on the banks of the creek. They started a new generation, a boy and a girl, who have also fallen in love with home. Like Montanans before them, they will be grounded and true and hardy. They will go out and come back like the current in an eddy.

dori gilels





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BLUE MOON

Startled, you step away
and disappear into
a shadowed corner.

So much velvet—
to invite you seems
inevitable.

What is the chance
a woman might walk
with a deer
on this border of pavement?

But my heart did jump,
and I was willing.

*tami haaland,
montana poet laureate 2013-2015*

WALK

The first year of my son's life, I walked.

His soft weight strapped to the front or back of me, I roamed the treeless, wildflower-filled foothills in spring, into shady canyons along icy streams in summer, under golden cottonwoods and azure skies in fall, stopping to nurse and watch the creek tumble, seeking calm and finding each other.

When he could walk, our mile-eating rambles shrank as my determined toddler insisted on being afoot. Now our perfect trail had lots of stones to toss into the river and a quick exit when we hit our limit.

Today, I watch my eight-year-old gallop down trails ahead of me and venture up grassy hillsides with his best friend in a world all their own.

My son has known, since he was brand new, the snap of November's clear air, the buzz of August grasshoppers, the swoosh of ice forming against the riverbank in February, the feel of our Montana home on his face and in his feet. We know where we can find each other and find ourselves.

"C'mon, buddy, let's go for a walk."

grace decker

A GRANDMOTHER'S LOVE

She was a Montana girl, tender but tough, never afraid of getting dirt under her nails. No matter the obstacles, the job got done. In her was the patience to teach students and grandchildren alike, and the strength to close every gate. Born on a ranch, she grew up in open spaces under a never-ending sky; as an adult she didn't ever stray for long from her Rocky Mountain roots. My grandmother was a woman to be reckoned with, a powerful force of nature but also the gentlest breeze. Her love for her grandchildren ran deep and was given freely; we were all of us forever following in her train. Walking for miles down gravel roads, checking fences and picking wildflowers. Always listening for the warning sounds of rattlesnakes. Her door was ever open for us to escape into her calming embrace. She taught me I could go anywhere, be anyone, do anything. She instilled in me the belief that if it can be dreamt it can be done, and anything under our big Montana sky is the limit.

morgan armstad

HERE

At a time when many of my friends had moved out of state to pursue their dreams, I stayed in search of mine: dreams of starting my own business, making music and seeking outdoor adventure and of marrying and starting a family. Those dreams have all come true, and then some. Here, I've built a business of ice cream. Inspired by Montana's starry skies, The Big Dipper brings young and old, from near and far. They ride their bikes across the country, stop by on their way to Glacier or Yellowstone National Parks, or walk from the local neighborhood. Here, they make new friends and see old ones. In my life outside of work, I get to play and perform live music with some of my best friends. My girls attend school just blocks away from our home. I run and bike our trails and embrace the snow. Here, I can be part of something bigger and better than myself. Here, I can stay and dream.

charlie beaton

nici holt cline

Luck & Instinct

by nici holt cline | founder of dig this chick

We pull into our campsite on fumes of luck and instinct. Always in search of something not on the map, somewhere we've never been, a new favorite spot, my husband and I have become pretty good at sniffing out fire pits by a fishing access or a little-known swatch of public land. Someday, I hope our daughters' feelings turn from tender impatience to tender appreciation at the nuance of studying paper maps and making wrong turns in search of something we don't know yet.

Mama, what do you believe in?



www.holt.cline

On a cross-country camping road trip last fall, my six-year-old expressed concern with our plans, saying that she just didn't know how she felt about it because she just didn't know what it would feel like. And I said, Amen. That's life in a nutshell kid. We just gotta go see what it feels like to decide how we will feel about it.

The site we find is rich with tall emerald grass, a small beach on the Boulder River and a giant slice of flat earth to support our tent. Our daughters, Margot and Ruby, tumble out of the car, ready to run and discover every

nook of this unfamiliar ground. While we set up camp, they discover a secret fort under the cottonwood tree, dry wood that is perfect for making ships, sand that will form delicious pretend pies, a mysterious deep hole on the riverbank, deer tracks and an aspen that has been halved by a beaver.

But Dada, WHERE does all this river water keep coming from? How were the very first water drops invented?

People talk about loving a place, being from a place, and I always lean in wanting to understand what it is that makes a person's blood move in tandem with a geographic coordinate.

I am from Montana. I have loved Montana since the moment I was swimming in the sea of my mother's womb, the daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter, all Montanans. That stout lineage doesn't necessitate a love but surely makes it hard to resist. The obvious physical beauty is easy for anyone to appreciate, even as a distracted witness hurling down I-90. It's getting up on the Rocky Mountain's sturdy scaffolding or pressing one's heartbeat into the Bitterroot River that will make even the most outdoor-averse human press their palm to chest, mouth open in born-again shock at the feeling of the smallness of us and the greatness of Montana.

Mama, when I get up high on a mountain, I feel stronger and faster and so happy! Do you ever feel that way?

This land holds the homesteads, farms, lore and ashes of my grandparents, great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents. My maternal family moved to the west shore of Flathead Lake from Ohio in an emigrant car with a crock of pickled eggs, two horses, a cow and chickens. That makes my daughters the sixth generation to walk on this land. I grew up inhaling the stories from my paternal and maternal sides — of my great-grandma riding five miles on horseback to school in Polson, my grandmother hauling her boys on hikes around Lake Como (where we spread her ashes years ago), my grandma baiting hooks at Lake Mary Ronan, my mom baiting hooks on Petty Creek, my dad and grandfather muscling their way up the old Snowbowl ski hill road with chains on their 1947 Ford.



mike.schirf@elements.mixed.media



My biorhythm was established by my ancestors — a kind and capable stock of women, with working calloused hands, unflappable grit and deep generosity. When my great-great-grandmas moved to Montana, they had to live in tandem with the dry, rocky, rattlesnakey land they tamed into farms and homes. One-hundred-twenty years later, their impassioned working of this earth and courageous mothering is the marrow in my bones.

I wake in our tent at dawn's beginning, a choir of birds earnestly announcing this new day. I study my daughters' sleeping faces in the lavender light and slide a bit deeper into my sleeping bag, hoping my husband will wake and make coffee soon.

Andy does get up to make coffee, maybe partially because I'm asking him in my most convincing way but mostly because he can hear the fish rising with the sun. From our tent I listen as the camp stove hisses and Andy readies his fly rod. Last night we noticed the grasshoppers were out, so I imagine he's tying a hopper on the end of that long, coiled line. Norman Maclean said, "In our family there was no clear distinction between religion and fly fishing" and this gospel certainly applies to our family. Our faith is in rivers, our rituals prescribed by the mountains' verse.

My daughters and I step into the cool water, trout perfectly camouflaged around our toes. The air moves, tickles skin and lifts gold hair and giggles into the season's current. Trees promenade with birds, my husband's fly rod keeps time with the river's pulse. I dive under, intentionally and gratefully knocking the breath from my body, swimming into this land's artery, into the endless pool of my foremothers.

Andy catches a rainbow trout and then a brown. He holds them still for one one-thousand, two one-thousand, three, so they can study the exotic oil-slick scales and full-moon eyes. He gently submerges the fish, and we watch it instantly disappear.

How did the trout get a rainbow on it? Did his mama give it to him like you gave me blue eyes?



It's time to drive home. We pack up camp, folding and tucking each object into the trunk as our daughters race around making mud sculptures and ladybug houses, attempting to squeeze every last bit of play out of our last few minutes here. I crack open our weathered gazetteer. We decide to take a snaking dirt road toward Livingston.

No matter how much we've explored Montana, there is almost always a different road to travel by, and we like the one with the views we haven't named yet, the one with the adventures we haven't created yet. The one that

holds a history we want to learn and a future we care about preserving.

Mom and Dad? If I go somewhere else to college or something, I can always come back to Montana, right? Because I know I will always want to be in Montana. ●

Nici Holt Cline is a fourth generation Montanan raising a fifth. She is mama to Margot and Ruby, wife, entrepreneur, gardener, crafter and runner who loves to write and take photos. Find her at digthischick.net

MONTANA
possibility



brian powers

Dear Big Sky Country,

HAVE I TOLD YOU LATELY HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU?

by *kimberley blaine* | *the go to mom*

When you come from a place of love, you always win. Montana won my heart over without even realizing it. My first experience with Big Sky Country was filming at Paws Up Resort for my digital mommy show. My trip was purely business; it was about experiencing 'glamping' (glamorous camping) and featuring the rugged northern state as a place for family travel.

Little did I know that my life would change forever. As I rode in the car to the resort, I looked out the window and felt different. Was this real?

I'm a controlling person and no one thing has ever possessed me. If this was anything that was true and real, I was in, I was had, I was bought, and I was owned. I was surrendering to something bigger than myself.

I'm rarely silent. I'm type A, talkative, hyper and always wanting to move. I was in pure awe in the back seat of the car for the 50-minute drive to the resort. I didn't want the ride to end. I could not speak. It was as though this experience was the drug of life I was longing for.

When I set my eyes on a beautiful Montana home, which was reflected onto a crystal-glass lake, I couldn't help but feel I was on a movie set or a participant in a painted piece of art. Even though I'm from California, which is the epitome of cutting-edge culture, innovation and open-mindedness, I felt you couldn't top the beauty of Montana. I will never minimize the charm



of California, but much of our land tends to be dry, neglected, rarely green, overcrowded, expensive, noisy and definitely not surreal. Montana is different, and one must experience it for themselves. Montana has a western reputation to uphold with the panache of its ancestry behind it. It is indeed the rivers, the historical value, the dinosaur fossils, the lakes, mountains, hiking trails, horses, fishing, skiing, wildlife and the big, beautiful blue sky that keeps people coming back for more.

After wrapping up our shoot for the episode and becoming aficionados on glorious glamping, we headed out to the airport for our trip home. I thought it would be my last time in Montana; it was lovely and quite stunning, but I had no plans to come back any time soon.

Little did I know that Big Sky loved me as much as I loved it. As I was boarding the plane I picked up a copy of **mamalode** magazine. Once again not expecting much, I turned each page and was enraptured by the beauty of the photographs and emotional stories about strong women and mothers tugging at my soul. On the flight home I read the magazine front to back. I thought to myself, What is going on with this place? I was now 100% obsessed with Montana.

The next day I emailed Elke, the editor of the magazine, and told her how much I was taken by Montana and by her magazine. I asked to write for her because it seemed right. I also knew she would not brush me off because my love for Montana was seeping through my veins and pouring through my heart and I know she felt it. It has been a great pleasure and delight to be a part of a wonderful state and magazine that so passionately tells people's life stories of struggle and triumph.

I know Montana holds a special place in our family's heart. When summer hits, we ask the children where they'd like to take summer vacation ... Hawaii or Montana? Can you guess which they choose? ❤️ Big Sky. ●



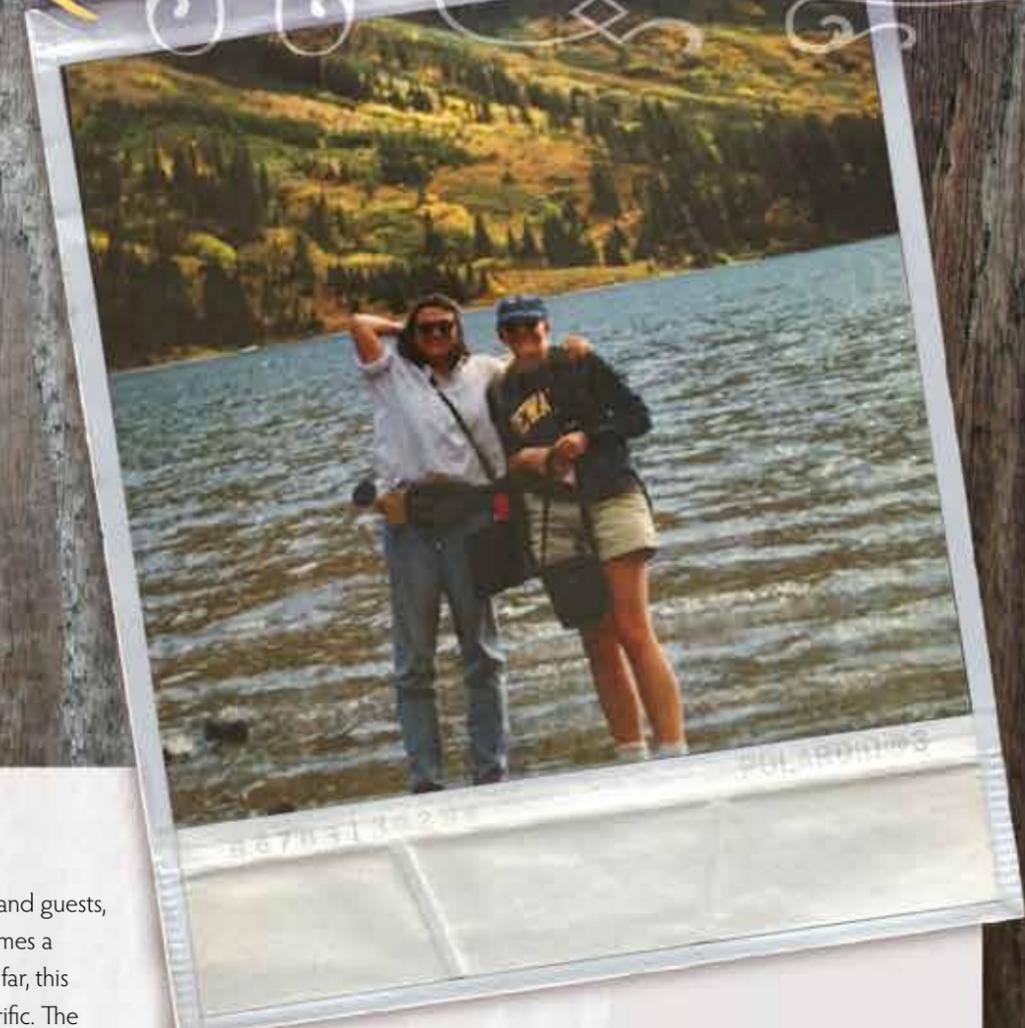
Kimberley Blaine is a motivational speaker, author and mother. Her favorite things to write about are donuts, wine, pets and Montana. She is known to most as The Go-To Mom and can easily be found goofing off on Snapchat: KimberleyBlaine or on Twitter @TheGoToMom – Read her work at TheGoToMom.com

MONTANA
moment



brian powers

MARVELED



Before coming to Montana, I had never been particularly outdoorsy. I was pretty much a city girl, having grown up in the swampy humidity of Houston, Texas. My time in Montana changed all that, and I will be forever grateful.

It was in Montana that I first encountered a real sense of wonder in creation. I am sure all the superlatives have been said and said forever. But majestic, awesome and breathtaking are

still words that would describe my experience there. I actually marveled at what I saw. I don't think I had ever marveled much before coming to Montana.

When I was weeks away from graduating from college, I had the usual set of unspecific plans for my future. Thank goodness, some of my friends were more focused than I because they invited me to apply for a job with them on a ranch in Montana outside of White Sulphur Springs. I applied for a cook's job there, where I would help prepare meals for a large number

of staff and guests, three times a day. So far, this was terrific. The only problem was that I had no idea how to cook. (I may have embellished my culinary skills and experience a little bit during the job interview.) Montana was a very strong attraction. I wanted to see it. I wanted to work there.

I got the job. I learned to cook.

As a young person, I found an emerging sense of independence in Montana. It is a place that encourages a spirit of independence. But being independent isn't enough. With the other people with whom I worked and played, I understood that teamwork is a necessity, not a luxury for the single minded. We relied on each

other, and that made my experience all the better.

I forged some lasting friendships with people who also were newcomers to the experience of marveling at our surroundings. Camping taught me about more than what not to be afraid of and what to honestly be cautious about. It also taught me about feeling literally closer to the earth while at the same time watching, in awe, the vastness of the night sky. I think that Montana showed me, at a very personal level, that we are all caretakers of this planet, and we need to take that vocation very seriously. If we are surrounded by nature that is so majestic and awe inspiring that it takes our breath away, then we should be responsible stewards of that beauty. Otherwise, the people who come after us will cease to use words like majestic and breathtaking. They might cease to marvel.

Learning cooking skills, being out in a remarkable environment, camping with friends—all these experiences began to bring me a keener sense of self-reliance as well as self-confidence. Just because you have never done something before doesn't mean that you can't learn how. But Montana can still be a rugged place, so I learned that self-reliance and self-confidence need to be balanced with a very healthy respect for nature.

I was truly sad to have to leave Montana and go on to what would be next in my life. (I also think that the people selling Patagonia clothing were sad to see me go as well. But if nothing else, I was now dressed for a more outdoorsy life.) I don't think that I made any kind of deliberate decision to base my life on that special time and place, but it is clear to me that I carried a great deal of my Montana experience with me right up until the present.

I took that sense of confidence and self-reliance and headed down a much-less-scripted path than many of my old friends and peers. I found that making the unconventional choice would fit my own life better. This path is a little more risky, and failure is always a distinct possibility, but the personal rewards make the risks worthwhile.

Let me tell you about one recent experience that might explain this best. Just before Christmas of 2015 I was invited to fly to Jordan to spend time at two refugee camps. There, I was part of a delegation that would work with young women and girls who had fled the violence and destruction of their homeland of Syria. It was, at times, scary. It was something I had never had to encounter before. The expectation was that I would be able to connect with people with whom I had so little in common. Or so I thought. Failure was a distinct possibility. After all, we were there to offer a sense of hope to people for whom hope was a distant, if not impossible, dream. They had no home to return to and no place to see their future. They were simply in this place, this same place, day after day.

Self-confidence, knowing when fear was appropriate and when it was just me, self-reliance combined with teamwork—these were valuable learnings that would carry us through. I found the genesis of those skills in Montana all those years before.

I am fortunate to have been given some incredible opportunities in life. Doors have opened for me, and I am very grateful that I have tried my best to walk through those doors into experiences that I could have missed otherwise. It is not just coincidence or chance. I think it is a matter of being open to a wider world and new perspectives. Maybe that is what “big sky” really means. ●

Meredith Walker is a Texan with a deep love for Montana. Formerly head of the Talent Department at Saturday Night Live, she now serves as Executive Director of the organization she co-created, Amy Poehler's Smart Girls, where she is a passionate advocate for changing the world by being yourself. Check out mysmartgirls.com



Duct Tape & Skiing

recipe for one entrepreneur

by *lisa stone* | co-founder of *blogher*

Skiing and being an entrepreneur are a lot alike. You know the pace could kill you, but you can't resist the thrill and the risks are worth it. Duct tape can help.

Little JJ was too short to reach the rope tow, and we had to solve this problem. My baby brother was two-and-a-half years old, my sisters were four and seven, and I was age nine. We had skied down the bunny hill together at Marshall Ski Area outside of Missoula—my idea as the bossy eldest—and now the only way back up was an evil, barbed rope tow.

Have you ever used a rope tow? Your job is to grab the rope, which is moving at about 10 mph uphill on a 500-foot loop suspended between a motor and a giant pulley. You line up next to the rope as it whips by, standing in the frozen tracks left by zillions of (mostly) parallel skis that went before you. Your job is to survive going from a complete stop to letting the rope pull you, balanced on your skis, up the hill, at what feels like 50 mph. So you grab the rope.

A little context: It was 1976 and we Stones had just moved to Montana from Maryland, Texas, Missouri (twice) and Georgia. In Montana I found nirvana—this little family ski joint with its rickety wooden chair lift. I was shy of people, chunky for my age, a bookworm with a funny Southern-ish accent and zero friends in this latest new place. But the first time my father strapped skis on my feet, I flew—slippery things on my feet just worked for me. I disappeared into beginner tree skiing on gentle slopes, pretended I was racing the ski patrol (who would have ripped my ticket had they seen my attempts to imitate them) and literally sang and laughed out loud as I tore down the slopes.

I looked at the evil rope, and I looked at my tiny brother. All I could think was: Uh-oh.

I already knew that frozen green rope, myself a veteran of at least three Montana winters. It's stronger than you are, and meaner too. It would tear any surface it touched for too long, from your gloves to your face. You had to grab it gently enough that you weren't knocked onto your stomach and dragged but strongly enough that you didn't tear your gloves down to your hands in just one turn because Mom said your gloves need to last the ski season. We weren't really good at this yet, hence the three layers of duct-tape Dad had wrapped over each of our palms since last weekend's damage.

JJ wasn't tall enough to handle the speed. The hissing rope had an even chance of either dislocating one of his arms or dragging and hurting him. No good.

"JJ," I ordered. (Bossy, like I said.) "Come stand in front of me here by the rope, and grab my knees."

"Kay!" said JJ, skating over in front of me and crouching

"WHAT?" said Nancy, age seven, and totally wise to the risks in my sudden strategies.

I braced my half-bent legs, and my little brother did the same, reaching behind to hold my knees. He was just out of diapers, and I was suddenly feeling like I needed one.

"You are CRAZY!" Nancy laughed. Little Anna just watched, mouth hanging open, as I snagged the angry rope, JJ hung on for dear life, and we rocketed up the hill. At the top, I looked back and saw my sisters had pulled off the same maneuver.

Skiing and being an entrepreneur are a lot alike. Like skiing, you know the pace could kill you, but you're addicted to the sheer risk—even though people tell you you're nuts to try. For me, the lure of untapped market opportunity is irresistible, like untracked powder. I knew I'd arrived as an entrepreneur when people stopped calling me "crazy" and started calling me "visionary."

"Crazy" is what colleagues called me in 1997 when I left CNN for the internet. I didn't care — I was hooked on my computer and the creaky, loud modem that delivered headlines and conversations when I wanted them, instead of waiting for the six o'clock news or talking to friends' answering machines. So I left my first career, journalism, and became a California entrepreneur.

Without my Montana upbringing, I don't think I would have gone for it in Silicon Valley. As I told my hometown paper, *The Missoulian*, my definition of Western values is the ability to think independently and to create something from wide, open spaces — while being accountable to a community where people know your name. For me, as a media strategist and storyteller, the world's best user laboratory was Paxson Elementary and Hellgate High schools, working at the Western Montana Fair and Southgate Mall, debating God with Mormon and Catholic friends (we were Protestant) and cruising the drag on weekend nights (um, sorry Mom and Dad).

Welcome to the last best place, Montana -- where folks are entrepreneurial by default: If we want something in this gorgeous, remote state, we have to create it ourselves. That's why, when Silicon Valley engineers told me female users would never embrace technology, or blog, and that women didn't typically raise venture capital, this Montanan ignored

their advice. I knew the kind of women I grew up around would fall in love with the efficiency and power of computers!

Tech machinery? No problem: Most women I knew growing up operated chainsaws, power tools and manual transmissions as handily as sewing machines — and I was just a town girl; women on ranches can build anything. Efficiency? Yes please: Montana women lean in and pull everyone else along with us, holding jobs and raising kids and creating the fabric of our societies, from church socials to public policy to local performance arts. An internet economy? Bring it: The neighborhood moms who helped raise me could stretch a \$10 bill for days with help from coupons, or a side hustle such as Mary Kay or Amway, and always find a Band-Aid, a cup of sugar or a stern word when you needed it most.

If you told my fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Lizotte, or even my government teacher, Ms. Copley, that this sarcastic, half-hearted student with big hair would create a media startup that paid women to write, they would have spilled their coffee on your face. But that's what happened. From 2005-2014, I was CEO and co-founder of BlogHer Inc., where I grew an idea for a grassroots conference into a start-up reaching 100+ million women a month, with \$30 million in annual revenues and a proprietary technology platform for engaging social media audiences. We paid women to tell their stories and share their photographs about everything from parenting to politics, while BlogHer marketed their work and split advertising and marketing fees with these creators. In 2014, I sold BlogHer to SheKnows Media, creating the #1 women's lifestyle digital media company in the United States.

Since nine out of ten start-ups fail, I'm happy with my first at-bat as a CEO. My proudest accomplishment is the \$36+ million BlogHer Inc. paid out to 5,700 women bloggers and social influencers from 2009-2013 for work-for-hire and advertising revenue shares. Plenty of our contributors were rural women. And all of our checks mattered: When we asked how women used BlogHer income, they reported investing it back into their own growing businesses, as well as paying mortgages, rents, and bills for groceries, medical care and credit cards.

Montana, with its vast beauty, dangerous elements, and history of human accomplishment and suffering, schooled me. I learned what motivates people, what it means to be part of and responsible for the welfare of a community, even when the weather, the economy or life goes south. And make no mistake — from the first clash of white settlers with Native or First Americans, Montana's survivors have been

lean, mean and innovative. That's why our growing economy is such a triumph, the result of the independent thinking and work ethic that absolutely characterizes Montanans.

You may have read of the wealth and jobs created by Bozeman's RightNow Technologies, acquired by Oracle for \$1 billion, and S&K Technologies, a family of five subsidiary companies owned by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. But now there's a whole new crop of entrepreneurs: You are reading **mamalode**, which I consider to be America's best parenting magazine, published out of Missoula. I hope you also will try out Red Ants Pants LLC, work wear for women, just one of our growing number of Montana-made fashion companies. Founder Sarah Calhoun's inspiration, the Red Ants Pants Foundation, hosts a music festival that now brings 15,000+ people and about \$3 million to the state!

You're invited to join us, and I hope you seriously consider it. Fortunately for permanent and seasonal residents of our beautiful state, the internet has no borders, and our cost of living here is lower, even though, as you'll see, our standard of living is so much higher. What's even more exciting is that you can get the independent-thinking work ethic here for a much smaller cost of employee acquisition and cost of doing business.

With a season pass and a little duct tape, who knows what you'll be inspired to accomplish? ●

*Whitefish Resort aka Big Mountain | 2012
left to right: Jake (15), Christopher Carfi, Lisa Stone, & Gordon (11) | two of their three kids*



Lisa Stone resides in Silicon Valley but still calls Missoula home. In 2005, she co-founded BlogHer, the world's leading publisher of women in social media. In 2014, she sold the company to SheKnows Media, creating the #1 women's lifestyle digital media company.

MONTANA
unplugged



brian powers

IN THE SAME BOAT

story by *tom jenni* | owner/outfitter of *tom jenni's reel montana fishing* | photos by *erika peterman*

I am a professional fishing guide, born and raised in Montana. For 100-plus days a year I take anglers from all over the world fishing on many of our famous rivers and streams. In 17 years as a guide, I have never intentionally killed a trout with a customer. My deep dark secret is that I grew up fishing Montana and back in the day my family ate nearly every trout we caught, returning to the rivers only those deemed "too small."

So it was with a mixture of chagrin and pleasure I heard my daughter Ruby loudly declare, "Let's eat it, Daddy." This was shortly after landing her first trout, a beautiful 14-inch brookie. I had just inquired, "Shall we put it back so that it can grow bigger and maybe catch it again some day, or do you want to eat it?" Ruby (yes, named in part for the beautiful Montana trout stream of the same name) landed her first trout at the age of four and knew exactly what she wanted to do with that fish. And so, with proper ceremony and reverence, we fried that trout in butter and ate it.

I grew up more or less obsessed with fishing. Admittedly, it was a summer event. There was "the opener" in May, and then we fished hard until September and hunting seasons started. Forty-four years later, I still remember exactly where on the upper Bighole River I caught my first trout, also at the age of four. I point out the remains of the little wooden bridge to my daughters each time we drive past it and tell them the story of my first trout, caught with my Dad and his friends. I remember where on Flint Creek I caught my first trout on a fly rod at age eight, three small rainbows all declared "too small."





So many of my early memories involve summer, fishing, family and friends. In search of trout, we explored and fished everything within 100 miles. My understanding of Montana geography is really based around places to fish rather than towns and cities. To this day, I know the rivers better than the towns.

So now my kids are growing fast, and I want them to know Montana like I do. And I want them to love fishing and the outdoors like I do. How to instill that in them? I have two girls, now ages 12 and 14. Neither have the fishing bug. Thank god for boats!

With the boat we can pile all of us in, along with camping gear, a cooler full of cold drinks, s'more makings and of course, some fishing gear. We fish a little, swim a lot, skip rocks, play on the occasional beach, fish a little more, admire the deer, eagle, otter and (if we are lucky) bear, swim some more and then camp ... right on the banks of a beautiful trout stream. I have my wife and two kids more or less trapped in a 6- x 14-foot space for the whole day. No cell phones, TVs or other modern escapes. The only way to achieve any privacy, if you need it, is to open a book and ignore each other in a good old-fashioned way. I have to slow down my urge to fish the whole time,

but everyone—me, wife MC, Ellie and Ruby—eventually grabs the rod and fishes. And when they do connect with occasional trout, they always wonder at its magical appearance. Every fish is a surprise gift. The water seems so uniform, and suddenly a bright, colorful, spotted creature appears as if by magic. With every fish, I see the same sparkle in their eyes that tells me they see the magic too. When we are first on the water in the morning and I get to fish, MC finishes her last cup of coffee while Ellie rows the boat and Ruby runs the net. That is when I realize how truly lucky I am.

Over many summers, my girls have learned: How to row, swim rivers, camp, cook a marshmallow and warm the chocolate just right for the perfect s'more and apparently, to fish. Near the finish of one of our family camp-out floats, I spotted a group of a dozen or so trout eating tricos.

Let me digress: Tricos are a very, very small mayfly (their bodies are about 4 millimeters long and less than the diameter of pencil lead). They hatch in such tremendous numbers that the fish key in on them and will eat nothing else. Fish eating them are notoriously difficult to catch, and tricos create some very frustrated fishermen. A trout



won't move very far to eat something so small, maybe an inch or two, and the "presentation" has to be perfect. The flies are tiny, the leader light. During late August or early September when the tricos are thick, I can often show a fishing customer hundreds and hundreds of trout feeding repeatedly, as often as once every few seconds. It appears to be an angler's dream. But sometimes it takes 10 perfect casts to get a fish to eat and maybe 10 so-so casts to get a perfect cast. There is just too much natural food available ... why take the artificial fly? Once hooked, the fish often break off in a matter of seconds because it doesn't take much head shaking to bust 3-pound test or a number 20 fly. In short, catching fish on tricos is a bit like earning a PhD in fly fishing.

So I anchor the boat at a good distance for me to take a crack at these fish. Ellie (now 14) looks at me and says, "I'd like to try." In an effort to manage her future disappointment, I carefully explain how difficult these fish will be to catch. Again, "I'd like to try."

I ask, "Can you even cast that far?" To which I receive, with an eye-roll and inflection only deliverable by a disrespected early-teen girl, "Daaa...aaad, I said I'd like to TRY." So I hand over the rod and watch while she promptly hooks and loses one. And then almost immediately hooks and this time lands a beautiful, wild, 16-inch cutbow. I am rather stunned and of course, immensely proud to be proven wrong. Maybe the family tradition will continue after all. ●

Tom Jenni is a lifelong Montanan and fly fisherman married to a cold water swimmer and raising two girls who can dance like nobody's business. He owns Tom Jenni's Reel Montana, a flyfishing guide service that is home to real rivers, real wild trout, and real service. Find him at tomjenni.com



perspective | from the mouths of babes

life in montana

by cora ide, age 12

I live here
With the trees
That become alive at night
Picked up by the wind as if they were puppets
Pulled on their strings for the first time
I live with the rivers and streams
The icy cold relief of the water in the blazing heat
I live with the big sky
That one certain shade of blue stretched across the entire sky
At night when the stars and moon dance about the mountain tops
I live here
With the wild creatures
The unexpected visitors randomly peeking in our backyard
The rare animals we take for granted everyday
I live with the snow
Large puffy flakes of pure white
The immense amount of frozen blankets piled up on the ground
I live with the people
The small town where "by word of mouth" becomes a reality
Where everyone knows everyone
I live here in this large house
Lucky and fortunate compared to nearly everyone in the world
I live here immersed in nature
I live among the mountains
I live in Montana

The sky's the limit.

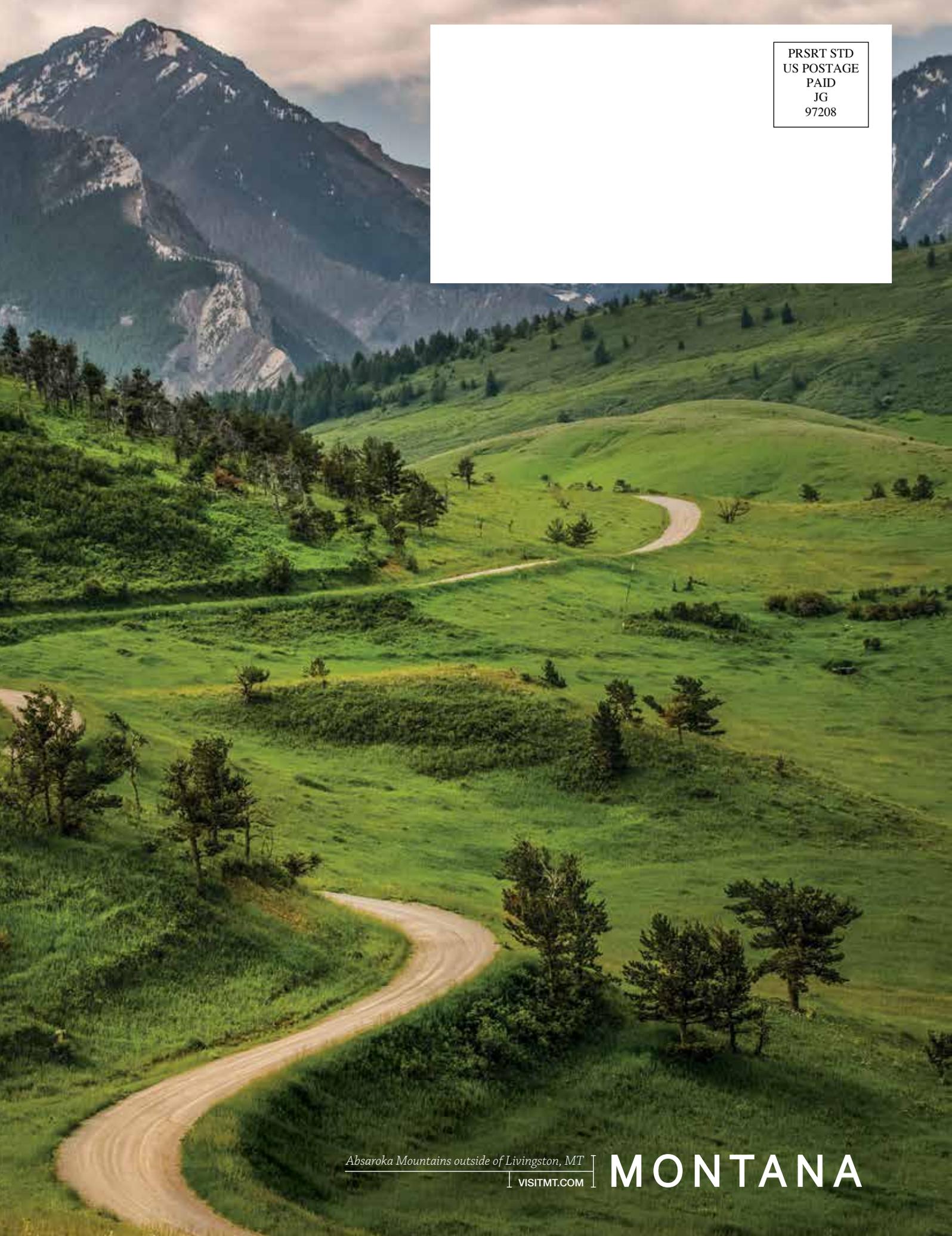


They came to Montana hoping to see mountains, lakes, wildlife and small-town charm. But when sisters Gale and Laura Straub hit the open road, they also found a rekindled connection with each other. On the first day of their Montana road trip, they woke up to this view of Flathead Lake. And it only got better from there. What will you discover in Big Sky Country?

See Gale and Laura's story, and what awaits you, at VISITMT.COM.

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Absaroka Mountains outside of Livingston, MT

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