

Finding palimpsests in day-to-day living

This fall we asked readers to help celebrate the 75th anniversary of *The Palimpsest* magazine by using that most unusual word: *palimpsest*. (Remember: the word is defined on the inside front cover.) These six readers found its meaning in their immediate lives. —The editor

"I saw in his face a palimpsest of Iowa farming, the lined brow from a dozen dry years, the red, rough skin from fifty harvests."

Gordon Marshall (Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

"My workbench has become a palimpsest of twenty years of woodworking. Every time I go to make another full-scale drawing or mix another custom stain, the lines and colors that cover the work surface evoke memories of pieces of furniture that long ago found new homes."

Russell Karkowski (Solon, Iowa)

"James Walter Shannon probably never knew the word 'palimpsest' but might well be one of the greatest of American palimpsests, in that while living in western Nebraska he searched for and collected Indian arrowheads and artifacts as he became a top authority on the Oregon Trail that passed through the area. Interested in all early 'imprints' he also collected antiques important in early agricultural American life, sharing always his passion, and delight, with grandchildren and friends."

Latha Shannon Bonnewell (Dubuque, Iowa)

"My grandma's patchwork quilt was a palimpsest—memories sewed together, to keep me warm."

Virginia C. McCammon (Des Moines, Iowa)

"The layers of dirt and soot on my torn jeans are a veritable palimpsest, revealing my encounters with the fresh morning grass and dew, with a big, beat-up, yellow 1977 Ford LTD and its monster 351 Cleveland oil-burner, with an old chair stained with grease, and finally, with the forests and wetlands of northern Johnson County."

Kurt Berge (Iowa City, Iowa)

"My mother, Beth Coon, is an antique dealer and furniture restorer. I have grown up watching her lovingly hand strip antiques of all varieties, working through the palimpsest the years have left. From eight or nine coats of paint in as many colors on a mission-oak table, to the dull patina on brass knobs, to badly damaged veneer on the drawers of a possum-belly cabinet, the layers are a testament to the lives of the furniture. With infinite patience and the joy of discovery, she strips away, bit by bit, all that obscures the natural beauty of the fine craftsmanship of ages past."

Stephanie Coon (Ames, Iowa)