

Allergic Reaction

by Liz Jameyson

On his way to his first fishing expedition in the Bay Area, the man remembered the rustle and shimmer of the willows by the muddied Jemez River in New Mexico, cold beer, the clean camaraderie of childhood friends. He walked along a path choked with greenery to the San Pablo Dam Reservoir, just north of Berkeley, California. His face stretched taught in smile.

The Bay Area disappointed him: hiking trails as crowded as supermarket aisles the Saturday before Superbowl Sunday; people stepping into the street in front of his car without warning; paying more rent for a shack-once-garage—with no stove but a hot plate—than a stand-alone home—with a garden—in Albuquerque.

Elevation: add that to the list. Albuquerque is a mile high, hundreds of feet above poison oak's growth line.

Fish caught, the man, an unwitting collector of urishiol oil, strolled back through the congested path. At home, he stretched on the couch, napped, scratched his ankle, touched his cheek, took a hot shower, masturbated.

The angry swelling and weeping began the next morning on his ankles and traveled upward over calves, thighs, genitals, chest, arms, face.

Lie naked on a sheet, arms and legs spread wide. Wash sheet. Repeat.

Three weeks passed. Anaphylaxis visited along with his mother. Her homeopathy failed.

Fifteen years later, next to his daughter's geometric drawing of the Sandia Mountains, the recipe for the cocktail the doctors ordered remains pasted to his refrigerator.

