



THE ROSE METAL PRESS

Field Guide to Writing

Flash Nonfiction

Advice and Essential Exercises from
Respected Writers, Editors, and Teachers

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ing can arise through writing in list form. You'll be over the river and through the woods, so to speak—finding a clearing in your writing just when you least expect it.

A FLASH NONFICTION ESSAY

The Soils I Have Eaten

The state soil of New York is named for the place where a man lost his finger to a rattlesnake. The finger lays quiet in the ground. The snake's great-great-grandsnakes still chitter through this soil. Sometimes one snake gets the idea he can blink his eye. He concentrates on this single violet thought. A slick frog crunches a maple seed, and the snake immediately forgets what he was thinking.

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Each bend of cypress root drinks a soft fen mud. Each beard dangling from a branch says: I am a dirty man who had soup for lunch. The state soil of Florida is Myakka—a fancy way of saying, *Sand, sand, sand*, and if you dig further still? *Watery sand*.

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Casa Grande is, of course, Arizona's state soil—salty and robin-red enough to make even the bottom of your pant legs blush. Dust devils whip against a flat house set against the side of Camelback Mountain. The camel's legs tuck up around palm tree and strip mall. He longs to eat a salad of thorn and dates. He longs to eat the leather of a saddle. If you squint, you can see the tongue clean his eye of gnats at night.

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Harney sounds like a friend who will help you in a pinch: silty, loamy, good enough to feed your family, and mine too. In Kansas, we sit around the table and break bread with Harney soil. Good guy, that Harney.

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In Illinois, I ate dark Drummer soil—mottled loam and gray clay. A little bit of city grit and soybean. A little light and dark. Street corner and silo.

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Ohio's Miamian soil is like coffee at a dive bar: medium roast, hickory ash, a tiny dash of guitar and smoke. Where is the waitress with red stain on her cheeks, old phone numbers tucked into the ticket book at her hip? That used to be me. Where is the torn and pilled-up pool table, the dart board, the wall behind it pimpled with holes?

—Aimee Nezhukumatathil, from *Brevity*