



**RHETORIC...the Sequel---
On The Great Old Broads,
Jim Garmhausen and Ed Abbey**

As some of you know, I have been angering, or at least annoying readers in southeast Utah and beyond for more than 20 years and I am proud to say I have infuriated both ends of the political spectrum at one time or another. When I started *The Zephyr*, I was determined, for better or worse, to be evenhanded and consequently, I always provided space for even my most vehement opponents. There has never been a hostile letter to the editor I would not print.

Looking back, clearly there have been times when some of my own sarcasm and “humor” has been counter-productive and hurtful. Beyond that, I was sometimes unwittingly creating a sympathetic backlash. Later I’d learn that facts are more powerful than rants.

I admit that in the early years I was more of a knee-jerk liberal—nowadays I’m a knee-jerk for all people--and consequently, much of the criticism hurled at me came from the conservative wing of my readership.

For example, in the early 1990s, when *The Zephyr* expressed opposition to a proposed multi-million dollar road over the Book Cliffs to Vernal, the local politicians were furious. When the BLM chained Amasa’s Back, it was my turn to be furious and that made the ranchers mad. I didn’t much care for a toxic waste incinerator at Cisco and I caught hell for that too, mostly from the part of the population who had a history and work background in mining and oil and gas exploration. I could understand their hostile reaction, though I did not agree with them. When people asked the Grand County road board chairman to describe my newspaper, he said, “I only need one word to describe it...CRAP!!!”

Real estate developers didn’t like my “anti-growth” attitude and I made very few friends from that sector either. One Moab realtor complained that I read too much Edward Abbey and that I wanted to roll the clock back and live in a cave. I replied that it depended on the cave. More on Cactus Ed in a minute.

About ten years ago, I looked around at what “my side” was doing in its quest to both preserve wilder-



The global economy is built on the erroneous belief that the marketplace—read human greed—should dictate human behavior and that economies can expand eternally. Globalism works under the assumption that the ecosystem can continue to be battered by massive carbon emissions without major consequences.

Chris Hedges

TAKE IT or LEAVE IT...

By Jim Stiles

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ness and create an economy based on recreation, tourism and “amenities,” and realized the liberal solution to the economic woes of rural Utah—to turn it into a little urban New West population center--- was creating impacts of its own.

I’ve always believed that saving what remained of wilderness is a moral and ethical issue, not an economic one, and when the environmental movement started promoting the economic advantages of wilderness, even when it degraded and demeaned their own cause, I took exception and subsequently incurred the wrath of my liberal friends as well. It was strange to see real estate developers and environmental groups on the same side of the fence.

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When I exposed the fact that many green groups are now being funded by wealthy capitalists whose interest in being on their boards is questionable and whose conflicted agendas reek of hypocrisy, they came unglued.

In a *Salt Lake Tribune* editorial, SUWA’s executive director claimed I was the “Barney Fife of the desert” and maintained that my “rant says less about SUWA than about Jim’s own curious little world. As its only resident, he’s in charge. He gets not only his own opinion but his own facts.”

Yeesh.

But if SUWA and the road board were being honest, they’d have to admit that what infuriates them the most is when I quote them accurately and I DO get my facts right.

Clearly, I can’t please anyone—right or left. But then, as a writer...that’s not my job.

So here it is, Spring 2011...the conservatives and the liberals are as happy with each other as they ever were, the name calling is getting even hotter, the rhetoric more irrational, the country is spinning out of control and if I really had my druthers, I’d say to hell with the whole mess and hide out in a corn field

(which is what I do most of the time anyway).

When it comes to my own rhetoric, no matter what I say, do or scribble, the Right still thinks I’m a bleeding heart lib and the Left thinks I’ve abandoned my ‘progressive’ components and become a gun-waving redneck.

A few weeks ago, I stuck my nose into San Juan County’s latest controversy—the “WANTED: DEAD or ALIVE” posters that circulated at some backcountry trailheads and threatened the environmental group Great Old Broads for Wilderness. My friend Bill Boyle, editor of *The San Juan Record*, re-printed an essay that first appeared here in the Feb/Mar edition, called “Rhetoric, Death, Wilderness & Candor.”

My story noted that whoever printed the posters and distributed them acted recklessly and irresponsibly or worse. In San Juan County, hot-headed rhetoric from both ends of the political spectrum runs rampant. Because the political mood here is dominated by conservatives, their rants are easier to find. But I also included some of the condescending words that come from the left, specifically a passage or two from author and SUWA employee Amy Irvine and her bitter personal attack on the residents of Monticello.

The response from the left was just as I expected... nothing.

I once noted that when a Conservative really gets hot under the collar, he’s apt to get right in your face and growl, “One more word and I’ll knock your block off!”

But the Liberal? He’s more likely to sniff, “I will not even dignify that comment with a reply.”

I think I’d rather get punched.

But for the last couple weeks, Blanding’s own conservative polemicist/letter-writer, Jim Garmhausen, has been confusing me with a combination of conflicting comments. If he thinks he can placate me by agreeing with me, all the while making my point for me via his recent rash of letter-writing, he is mistaken. In the same way that many of my environmentalist pals have quit talking to me because I disagreed with them on some issues, there have been a number of conservatives who think I’ve swung to the other end of the political spectrum because of my criticisms of mainstream environmentalists. Garmhausen even joined *The Zephyr Backbone!*

Neither view is correct.

A couple weeks ago, Garmhausen took note of my effort to be evenhanded. “To his credit,” he observed, “San Juan Record columnist Jim Stiles has made an

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honest attempt to find a neutral ground for non-confrontational language and reasoned discourse in the current land-use debate.”

Even that wasn't quite right, but it was all downhill after that.

He described the difference between the “sweet, decent, hard-working people of San Juan County and the grant-dependent neurosthenic Old Breds, who have come here to facilitate Big Government suppression of our civil liberties.”

He wrote: “Here's a good idea Ms. Egan (executive director) of the Old Breds could use to suck even more grant bucks out of Government bureaucracies and bored rich white people: Declare Durango an Area for the Study of noxious invasive species. That way the Old Breds could study each other.”

You can almost feel the love.

When it comes to my own rhetoric, no matter what I say, do or scribble, the Right still thinks I'm a bleeding heart lib and the Left thinks I've...become a gun-waving redneck.

Garmhausen actually scores a couple valid points, but they're so buried in his vitriol that the facts get lost in the rant.

The truth is, most of the Great Old Breds' staff and board are longtime residents of the rural West and its director, Ronni Egan, is an accomplished wrangler who could probably rope and brand Mr. Jim before he could scream “Liberal Bolshevik Bag!”

It's reasonable to surmise that many of its members are from urban areas or are recently transplanted to New West communities and here is where the differences with rural residents become so sharp. Urban environmentalists, after a lifetime in the city, see the sparsely populated places in the West differently than many who have spent their lives working here.

If you can imagine what it's like to live in a sardine can for most of your life, perhaps you can also understand how precious the wide-open spaces are when they get the rare chance to enjoy them. Consequently, right or wrong, many urbanites see the West in its entirety, as one big national park. Even when they move here, they generally loathe the idea of anyone making a living from the land. Many come here after retirement, when earning a living is no longer a problem.

For decades I've heard rural Westerners accuse their pro-wilderness opponents of wanting to “lock up” the West. Well...that's probably true. They do. But their motives aren't nefarious. Their goal is not, as Mr. Garmhausen insists, “to facilitate Big Government suppression of our civil liberties.”

Urban environmentalists' vision of western land use may be naive, but it's not sinister.

I still find myself pulling a quote from the most honest conservationist I've ever known, Wendell Berry, who notes that while most environmentalists object to the impacts from the extraction of natural resources, they rarely connect the dots to the gasoline they keep pumping into their SUVs. They loathe the damage caused by the production of resources but have no trouble consuming them.

Still, I don't see how anyone can mock their conviction or their dedication to a cause, even if you vehemently disagree with them.

Clearly, environmentalists believe the best way to “save” Utah's wilderness and make a buck as well is to abandon the extractive industries, like mining, in favor of tourism, which in the end is the most extractive business of them all. But isn't that what San Juan County is doing too? Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that Blanding, Utah, the bastion of anti-wilderness conservatism, promote itself as the “Base Camp to Adventure.” And the county advertises our scenic beauty on...of all places...NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO! Surely Mr. Garmhausen can see the irony in that.

If there is a fair criticism to be made here, for me at least, it's the way Great Old Breds, like every other environmental group I know, has got caught up in the money game. My friend Susan Tixier founded GOB, about 20 years ago with some other women over 50.

She was its first executive director, worked practically for free, and simply liked being an “old broad” with the courage of her convictions. She could also probably pin Jim Garmhausen before breakfast.

Nowadays, GOB has a quarter million dollar payroll and gets some of its funding from the same wealthy capitalists who are compromising the integrity of other grassroots green groups.

Their argument is (and I think they really believe this) that they need all the money they can get their hands on, dirty or not, to fight the corporate giants--oil companies et al--that they oppose. The irony here is that billionaires who DO have vested interests in energy companies and the profits they generate ALSO sit on the boards of environmental groups and donate huge amounts of money. The staffs of these groups should be wondering by now just what these guys are up to...but they don't.

Jim Garmhausen also has a few words about author Edward Abbey. If he is just now discovering Abbey's extraordinary bundle of contradictions, he is late to the game. Jim is absolutely right when he says that some mainstream environmentalists pick and choose their favorite Abbey quotes and leave the rest under the couch. So do conservatives. Ed Abbey may have been the greatest contrarian of all time and he did it for decades with a wink and a smile. To this day, I'm not sure what Abbey was really thinking. I gave up even trying a while back. I do think he'd be happy to know we're still debating his real essence, more than 20 years after he died.



Finally (thank Heaven), and still referring to Ed Abbey, Mr. Garmhausen complains, “I seriously doubt that Mr. Abbey would approve of the people who act in his name bursting into tears and threatening to tell Mom because somebody said harsh words.”

I don't think any of the Great Old Breds is on the verge of tears, nor am I. When I talk about civil discourse, I'm not talking about “neutral ground” or “non-confrontational” behavior, or even compromise.

What I'm talking about is sticking to the facts...arguing with passion and conviction, but with some class and integrity. And here's something rarely tried--try standing in your opponent's shoes. I am--foolishly or not--- convinced that none of us are quite as bad as we think and I wish there weren't so many people trying to prove me wrong.

THE ZEPHYR HEADS INTO YEAR 23.

March 14, 1989—Ed Abbey died and *The Zephyr* was born on this day. 22 YEARS AGO. Most of you know the story...

For the past two decades, we have been trying to put together a newspaper that is as honest and candid and cantankerous as he was. I would not begin to try and measure our degree of success. But at best it's mixed.

With this issue, we move into our third precarious year as a ‘cyber-rag.’ The last print *Zephyr* rolled off the presses in Tooele more than two years ago. Barring a miracle, none of us will ever see *The Z* on paper again and many of you have rebelled at the change, to the point that some of my once most loyal readers have quit reading it altogether, simply because they don't like the format.

We ALL have to get over this.

The only reason this publication survives is the internet. Two years ago, with dwindling revenues and increasing production and distribution costs, the only alternative to shutting down completely was to move here. Ultimately, this may be the ONLY place that the truly free and independent media can survive and, with your help and participation, flourish.

Look what's happening to the media—many publications are dying. Others are being bought up by giant media corporations. Consider HuffingtonPost's sell-out to AOL. Other regional and local publications are getting a big dose of dollars from wealthy donors and are being co-opted in the process. If a newspaper cannot print the news it sees fit to print, without looking over its shoulders at the finance department, then it's not ‘free’ at all. What happens when a story has to be screened to make sure it doesn't upset the balance sheet?

Did you read these stories---

Okay, Here's The Deal With The AOL-Huffington Post Deal...

<http://www.businessinsider.com/aol-huffington-post-deal-2011-2>

Does Gates funding of media taint objectivity?

“Better-known for its battles against global disease, the Gates Foundation has also become a force in journalism. The foundation's contributions to nonprofit and for-profit media have helped spur coverage of global health, development and education issues. But some people worry that its growing support of media organizations blurs the line between journalism and advocacy.”

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2014280379_gatesmedia.html

As we enter our 23rd year, *The Zephyr*—like all surviving independent rags--- needs more readers and it needs more financial supporters. We're not looking for corporate grants. We are not looking for a sugar daddy/mommy. Over the years, I've accepted lifetime Backbone memberships to the tune of \$1000 each, from about five good *Zephyr* souls. Mostly, though, the *Z* survives on the \$50 and \$100 ads and Backbone contributions that keep us in beans. Beans is all we ask.

At the end of the day, the question that needs to be asked is: Does it matter? In the whole scheme of things, if *The Zephyr* withers and goes away like so many other independent newspapers, will it make a difference? Will anybody even notice?

In the whole scheme of things, if *The Zephyr* withers and goes away like so many other independent newspapers, will it make a difference?

Probably not.

Probably not. But if you're not completely sure you're ready for the End— if you'd like to see this cranky, home-owned, fiercely independent publication stick around a while, then embrace your laptop and READ our *Z*.

Do you miss reading the *Zephyr* on the toilet? With laptops and WiFi, you can carry on exactly as you once did. Tell your friends about your new laptop/toilet reading tradition and I guarantee you—as an added bonus-- nobody will ever try to borrow your laptop again.

And FINALLY, if you care enough about *The Zephyr* to put your money where your mouth is, please consider an ad or a membership in the Backbone. Details are at the top of the home page.