

LOSING SOLITUDE

By Martin Murie

Remembering a Jackson Hole Childhood:

Imagine the scene: Homestead cabin on the old STS ranch in the days of Buster Estes and Frances, cowboy and teamster from Colorado and Dude from the east. The cabin is low-ceiled and the only source of heat is the fireplace that glows in the night. The living room is large and we kids find places on the floor. A couple of lamps shed faint light, but there are shadowy places all around. "Major" Mapes is telling a long story of his adventures as an oil and gas explorer for a major oil company.

I remember only two scenes from the story. In one story, a beautiful woman nurses "Major" Mapes through some disease, maybe malaria. And the other told of the assassination of Pancho Villa.

Villa was known in the United States as a bandit because he and his riders crossed the US border. Little did we know that Pancho Villa was the leader of the revolution in Northern Mexico in the early years of the twentieth century: 1910-17; and Emiliana Zapata was, with others, an important leader in the South. Both Villa and Zapata were assassinated, but their revolution led to a new constitution in Mexico.

But we kids accepted the bandit label. After all, "Major" Mapes was the authority. The climax of the story was when Mapes produced a photograph he'd taken of the body of Villa. We kids crowded into the spaces between adults and caught a glimpse of Villa, laid out on a table, stiff and dead.

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Martin and his dog on Sleeping Indian Mountain on the east side of Jackson Hole. Early 1920s.

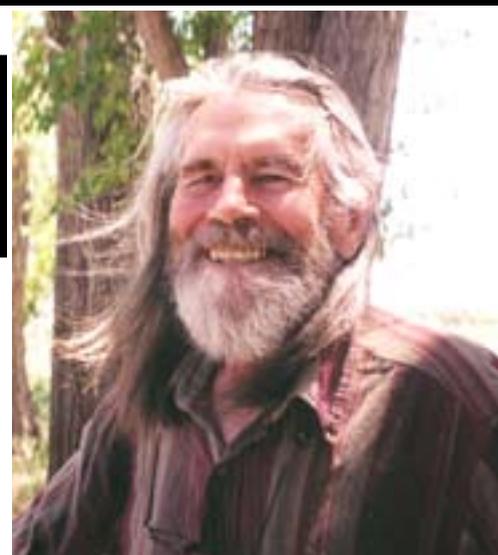
Fred Deyo, game warden, loved to play tricks, but some turned serious. A rancher's dog was chasing elk on the Elk Refuge. Fred drew his pistol and shot at the dog. The rancher went into the barn and reached for his shotgun. Fred turned his pistol on the rancher and shot him, hit him in the upper lip. In the court case that ensued Fred's plea of "self defense" was honored.

On the day of Fred's court appearance, Sonny and Harold and I climbed a barbed wire fence to tease the Deyo's milk cow. She came at us and we scrambled over the fence. Harold got tangled in the wires and broke his arm. Sonny and I raced through the willow jungle to get help. However, Pearl Deyo, in spite of her worries about her husband, came into the back yard, untangled Harold and called the hospital.

To reinforce our fear of Fred's impetuosity, my dad, Olaus, would tell of a time he and Fred took a drive in Olaus's Ford van, which had once been used as a hearse. The truck ahead was in low gear, going too slow for Fred. He drew his sidearm and rolled down the window and fired two shots, one to the left and one to the right. The truck was driving on the Boucher Hill grade, just out of town. Whether the driver heard the pistol shots above the racket of the truck, neither Olaus nor Fred knew. The truck driver maintained his slow speed. Chastened, Fred put the firearm back in its holster and waited impatiently for the grade to level out in the north sagebrush plains, which it did in about half a minute.

Freds' tricks were often exceedingly simple. He and his deputy had heard about a moose being shot out-of-season in the far north of the valley. Sonny and Harold and I were spending two days in Harold's dad's one-room winter trapping cabin. We had found the dead moose earlier and we directed Fred and his partner. They found the moose, its hide and most of its meat gone. Bloody bones were all that remained. That evening Fred and his partner camped in the front yard of the cabin, spread a large tarpaulin to serve as their kitchen and cooked thick hunks of beef. I was inside frying frog legs for supper when suddenly the cabin filled with smoke. I knew immediately what had happened. Fred had climbed onto the roof and placed a flat rock on the chimney. I ran outside and, sure enough, the chimney was blocked and Fred and his deputy were laughing. Fred climbed onto the roof, moved the stone and, still laughing at me, grabbed the stone and threw it down. The simple-minded trick was over.

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...And Another Update from the Peace Front

Enough of "Major" Mapes and Fred Deyo. I have lots more Jackson's Hole stories, but I want to speak of NOW, before it's too late.

The first hint of a step forward in Yellow Springs came to us "peaceniks" when we joined the Fourth of July Parade through town.

First, a confession: Yellow Springs has a well-deserved reputation for liberalism. Despite that, the welcoming we peaceniks received was astounding. We had become accustomed to "V" signs and thumbs-up signals from drivers in the safety of their own cars, but this was an occasion for cheers and v-signs and cameras in action. Even kids, imitating their parents, gave us v-signs. The crowds lining both sides of the main drag through Yellow Springs couldn't hold back from cheering out in the open, knowing full well that there were others there who resented our presence on this Sacred Day.

I carried a poster declaring, "Stop the Wars, Save the Earth. Another member of our anti-war coalition carried a sign that said, simply, "Peace." The founder of the anti-war protests didn't have a poster, but she rode a tri-cycle. She started the protests while her husband was serving a six month's jail term; if I remember, she had served a three month jail sentence for her protests of the School For The Americas. She returned to Yellow Springs and started the anti-war protests. Many knew her and applauded her. That was the turning point, half steps.

I had been approaching pedestrians on the sidewalk, asking, "Have you ever thought of joining us?" Most of them said they appreciated our protest, but hesitated about putting their body on the line. My second response was, "It will change your life?" That brought a light in their eyes, but usually only one or two showed up the next Saturday.

Suddenly, that changed. People I'd never seen before brought their own posters or hoisted our store of world flags and flags with the peace symbol on it. One couple brought their few-weeks-old baby. Last Saturday I approached a couple and the male said, "I'll be honest with you. I do appreciate your protest, but I'll never stand with you." They went on and then the wife came back to me, gave me a one-arm hug and said, "I'll think about it." I kept having these close encounters and sometimes the next Saturday there they were!

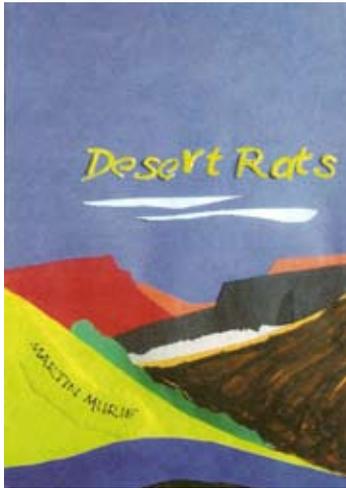
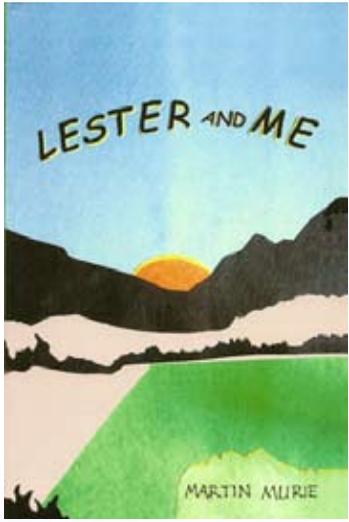
These encounters took place BEFORE the electoral disaster. I haven't figured it out yet, but something happened in people's minds. Now, as I said before, Yellow Springs has a long-term reputation as a liberal town. However, judging from people's responses, in Y.S. and here in Xenia, I will hazard the guess that there is a real turning point across the Nation.

Last Saturday I approached a young man with my usual question and he said "Absolutely," and crossed the street to grab a flag. The main event is the influx of middle-aged or young people who had made up their own minds and joined us. No longer do we oldsters feel like we are "canaries in the coal mine," The word has spread, especially in the reaction to the war in Afghanistan.

WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER

We'll see if more strangers show up next Saturday, and the next. We now have one or two or three drummers. Those drum beats liven up the scene. I'll keep asking my question and the follow-up, "It will change your life." It does. Being on the street brings new challenges, and new understandings. Besides, it is fun talking to people and smiling and waving at passing cars. We have always gathered lots of honks, but now I think the climate is changing, the real climate and also the climate of our society.

Peace/Resist Martin



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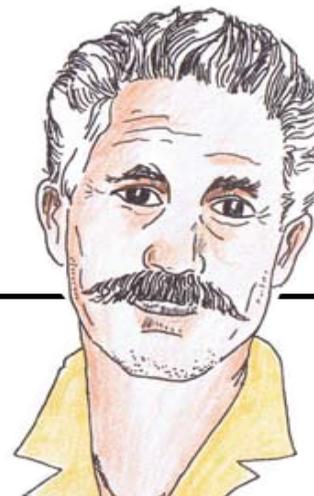
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