

# LOSING SOLITUDE

By Martin Murie



## ACTIVISM

There is something halfway mysterious about knocking on strangers' doors or standing on sidewalks exposed to pedestrians and passing traffic. I won't try to unravel the mysterious part, but looking back over decades of activism it is hard to avoid this conclusion: there is an easy way to move into the world, step outside your own preoccupations, Lose Solitude.

It is no secret that a false spiritualism has taken over Americans in our time, reducing the wilderness to a place of narcissistic epiphany. There is more to "the wild" than that. You have to get used to it; there's evolution to consider, as well as our little-understood ecosystems and our own way of travelling, or just sitting still, in wilderness.

Activism, as a life of learning and leaving behind arrogance, is the way out of these individualistic traps. "A man," said Martin Luther King, "has not begun to live until he can rise above his own individual concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." (Cited by Arianna Huffington, in Progressive Populist, February 15, 2010). Fortunately, in America, people taking to the streets are not yet put down with rifle fire, as they are in Honduras and other third world nations. Which isn't to say that activism is always easy. In the MLK times, in the Deep South, street actions were far from safe. We need to look

back to those times of no compromise and remember the commitment of those activists to the Bill of Rights. Either full citizenship for Blacks or a continued life of suffering—that is the stark choice that confronts us today as a series of crises descends all at once on our good old USA. Unemployment, Climate Change, Credit Crunch, Local and State Budget Squeezes, and Health Care, still under the control of Insurance corporations.

But we needn't assume all activism must be progressive. Oh, I have to tell you something about the old days in Jackson's Hole. (Jackson was a mountain man, fur trapper and the Hole is named after him, his favorite place). The ranchers and small businesses clustered around the town square held the political power of Teton county. These folks were not slow to look with favor upon European dictators as weapons against FDR and they were activists in their own right. After Pearl Harbor they quit such talk, but never relented in their opposition to FDR. Other people kept quiet and every time a federal election came around, they voted for FDR, all four terms. And perhaps those folks were activists of a sort too.

In fact, it wasn't until my platoon was returning from a patrol in the Appenine mountains of Italy in April 1945 that I heard a voice in favor of the president. We were passing a disabled tank, slipped treads in mountainous terrain, and the tank men had a radio on, announcing Roosevelt's death. My platoon leader said, "Roosevelt was a great man." I was startled. I assumed he was referring to the days of CCC, PWA, WPA--government hiring workers directly. No one in Jackson Hole had openly supported such policies.

A strange thing happens to you once you get out on the street. There are other ways to get into the world, travelling, reporting on what you see, but most of us don't have that opportunity. I'm here to say that when you act, and put your body where your heart is, you take a step into the real world. For one thing, each protest is different; you never know who you will be talking to. Sometimes people are hostile or politely hostile, but usually they are friendly.

[www.packratnest.com](http://www.packratnest.com)  
[packrat7881@att.net](mailto:packrat7881@att.net)

Newspapers and TV don't spend much time on The Great American Public as a group, other than reports of polls. Statistics. The individual diversity is amazing, but most people don't hold it against you for opposing wars, or else they agree, but can't take that step to actively protest.

The other thing that happens out on the street: you sharpen your listening apparatus. You want the other woman or man to know where you're coming from, but you listen with care to what they are telling you. You don't wait impatiently for the next thing YOU want to say.

Well, Losing Solitude is what we have to do. There are many ways of being a participant rather than merely an observer, but I am speaking here about one of the simplest ways: join a protest, even for ten or fifteen minutes. You can spare that can't you? Try it.



### FUN AT AN ANTI-WAR DEMO?

Yes. Lots of smiles and chuckles, and we sometimes get in the way of each others' posters, but the world flags (earth from outer space) keep flying and the peace flag is always there. Most drivers know us and expect to see us; waves and honks are numerous. But the part I like best is talking to walkers on their way, and, yes, we do sometimes block the sidewalks, but so far no troubles from that.

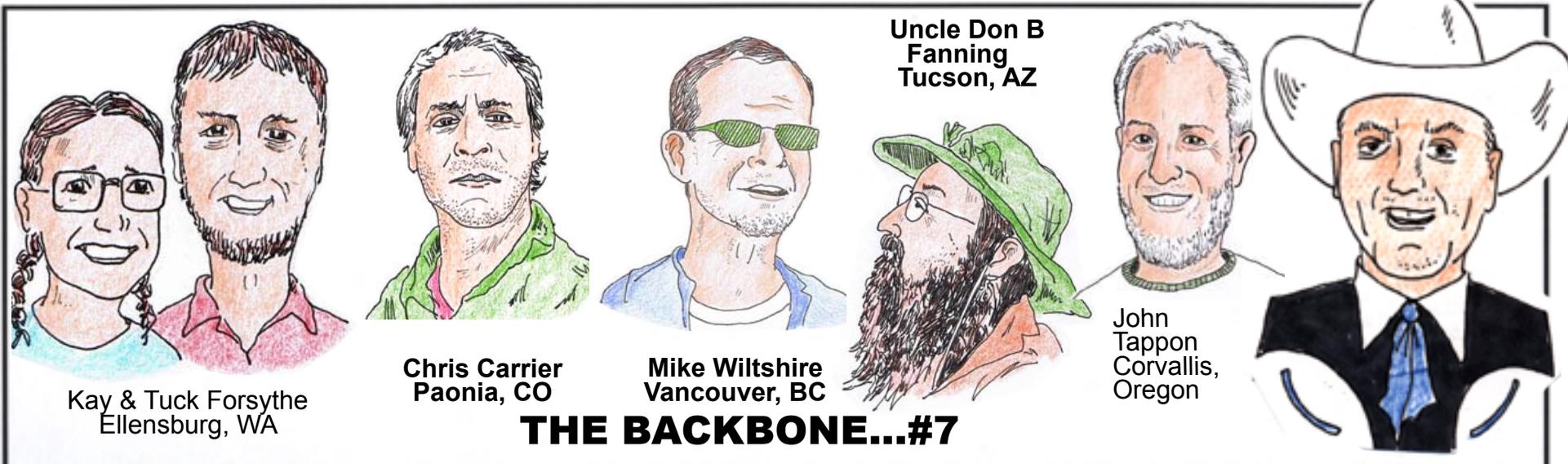
One of my wife Alison's pleasures is waving at passing cars (we all do that) and noticing the uncertainty some drivers or passengers reveal. They realize that they are noticed and some unconscious motive, buried till then, urges them to show a thumbs-up or a V-sign.

"A first step," Alison says.

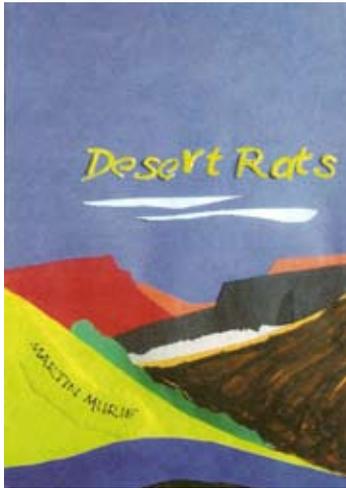
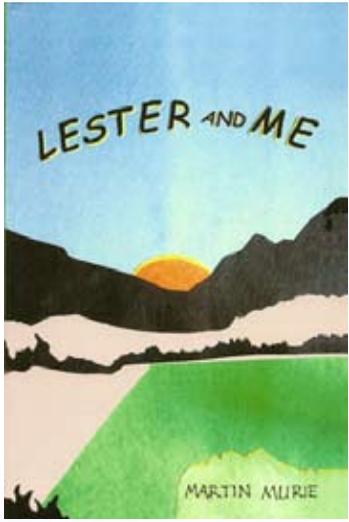
There are many dog-walkers who join the group. If the dog is big enough I suggest that he or she might bear a small message on its back. One day I told a walker that her dog was way too small to accept a message on its back. The dog was pure white, curly haired and so small it could not be smaller and still be a dog. The walker told me that her dog could carry a five-letter message: "Peace." I had to agree. Whether or not we succeed in our attempts to challenge people to join us, the conversation is nearly always interesting.

One Saturday a woman passed by my friend Bill and me, eyes directed straight ahead, ignoring us. Poor prospect for a conversation, but I blurted out, "You should consider joining us." She turned and gave us a long spiel, how sick and tired she was of the lies put out by our rulers, and apathy of American citizens. We stood there, amazed, listening to her long litany of grievances. It was not the time to try getting a word in, but finally I said, "By the way, you can spend five minutes with us, with a poster or not, your decision, or ten minutes or fifteen, whatever fits your schedule. We don't have a name, we don't have dues; we just show up."

She looked at both of us. "I have things to do today, but next Saturday I promise I will be here." Next Saturday was a miserable, rainy day and she didn't show up, but the next Saturday after that she did.



## THE BACKBONE...#7



ORDER SIGNED COPIES DIRECT FROM MARTIN MURIE:

- LOSING SOLITUDE:** A contemporary Western. Developers invade a cowtown...\$14.95
- WINDSWEPT:** Birdwatchers & a biker from Montana tangle with corporation extremists in Medicine Bow, Wyoming...\$14.95
- BURT' S WAY:** Environmentalists labeled 'terrorists,' keep a' chuggin' on the Quebec/New York border...\$12
- RED TREE MOUSE CHRONICLES:** Forest animals on assignment: What is the future of the forests? They turn activist.....\$6.00
- SERIOUSLY INSISTENT:** 80 pages of activist critique...\$7.00

These incidents are rare, but they do occur. I learned a lesson: Don't write anyone off, no matter what their expression shows. One day Bill and I were talking and a grumpy old man walked by. Bill recognized him, told me he had never shown the least interest in the demo. But today, a few steps further on, he turned and said, "Thank you."

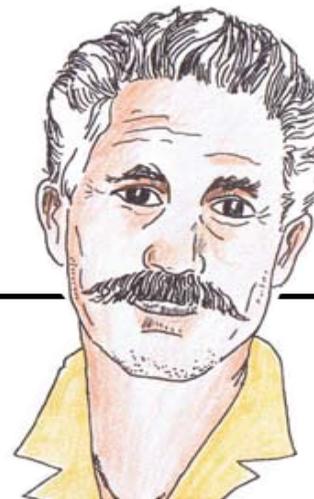
There are always responses—sometimes shouted disagreements from patriots of the "My country right or wrong" school of acceptance. When they shout, it is no time to be thinking of your retort. This is where the fine art of listening comes into our lives. We need to listen to all arguments. Democracy is a messy process and none of us has all the answers. Above all, we have to avoid arrogance, as though democracy with a small "d" is not a messy process. An arrogant person is one who thinks he or she has all the answers. Unfortunately, most of the people holding microphones in our society don't stoop to show that they are truly human; comedians are an exception, for sure, but the rest of us on our bully pulpit? Not so often. If we are going to speak for others, we must be humble.

**OPTIMISM.**  
**WE CAN STOP THE WARS.**  
**SI, SE PUEDE (YES, WE CAN).**  
**We need more people, that's all.**  
**So come join us and smile,**  
**sisters and brothers,**  
**smile.**

I am impressed again and again by the intense individuality of passers-by. Each one is memorable and engaging. Even among us protesters there is an amazing array of personalities. The one thing we all share is having had that experience of asking ourselves, "Why not get out on the streets, help stop the wars?" So, we show up.

I am talking directly to you, if you happen to read this. Fun on the streets? Why not? It is better than grim faces all around. If we believe in what we are doing, standing there in all weathers, why not show our belief on our faces. **OPTIMISM. WE CAN STOP THE WARS. SI, SE PUEDE (YES, WE CAN).** We need more people, that's all. So come join us and smile, sisters and brothers, smile.

[www.packratnest.com](http://www.packratnest.com)



**WE PRIDE OURSELVES ON OUR FOOD**  
 Our Genuine Mexican Cuisine comes from traditional recipes & methods from Baja California Sur & other states in Mexico.  
  
[www.miguelsbajagrill.com](http://www.miguelsbajagrill.com)  
 51 N. Main Street 435.259.6546

[www.miguelsbajagrill.com](http://www.miguelsbajagrill.com)

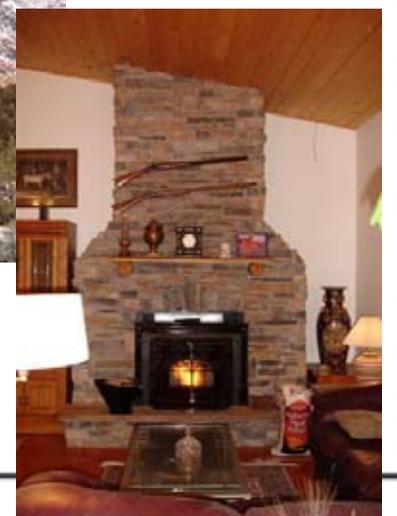
**Our Claim Stays the Same:  
 FART-FREE BEANS**

**REMEMBER ALL WEB LINKS ARE 'HOT'**  
**just 'click' & GO**

## CASTLE VALLEY HOME FOR SALE

CUSTOM EXECUTIVE LOG HOME ON 5 ACRES IN CASTLE VALLEY. 4 BEDROOMS; 2 3/4 BATHS; SPA ROOM; GREAT ROOM; MODERN KITCHEN-WITH JENNAIR GRILL/RANGE. WRAP AROUND COVERED DECK. HEATING & COOLING PROVIDED BY 2 FORCED AIR SYSTEMS. TRIPLE PANEWINDOWS THROUGHOUT. INCLUDED IN SALE: LOG FURNITURE IN LIVING ROOM AND MASTER BEDROOM, ANTIQUE BRASS GUEST BED, POOLTABLE, HOT TUB, OAK DINING TABLE & CHAIRS. OWNER/AGENT.

<http://gsjaor.fnismls.com/publink/default.aspx?GUID=3a4b3ebe-ccb0-481c-88c1-21d0f7c14136&Report=Yes>



**JOE D KINGSLEY**  
 Home: (435) 259-6034  
**COLDWELL BANKER ARCHES RE**  
**moabking@citlink.net**