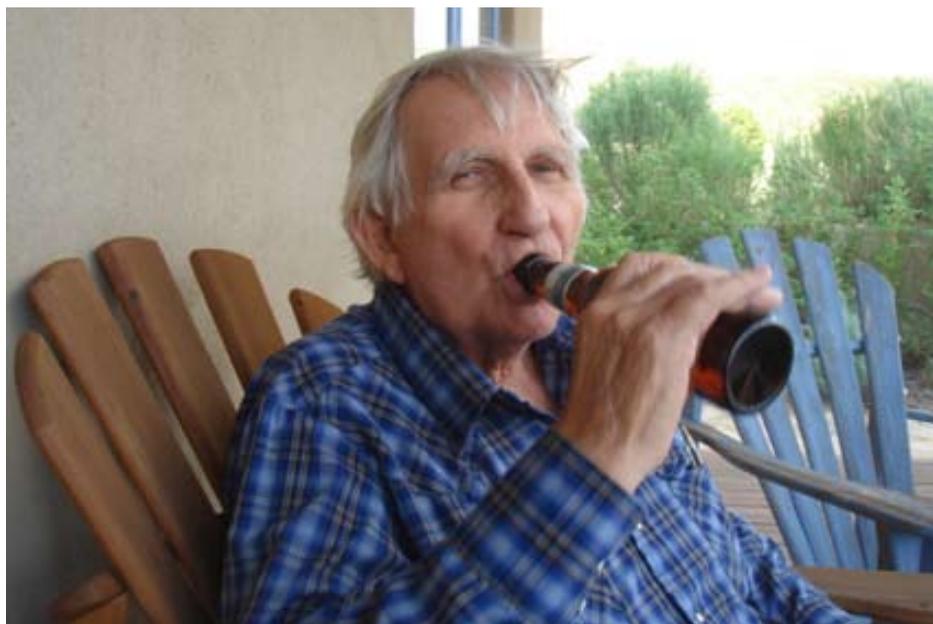


DUTY to DISOBEY

(continued)

ing... we took those boxes of beer cans and threw them on the road,” Sleight says. “They weren’t supposed to have this dam.” Sleight pauses, and his anger hangs in the air for a moment. “They weren’t supposed to have this goddamn road. They weren’t supposed to have all these things that were so obscene. And it was our way of expressing ourselves. Our own free speech, and so forth. ‘I’m going to shit on your highway.’ That’s what we did.”

Abbey, after all his books and speeches and proclamations in favor of environmentalism, took a hit for rendering the moment into a scene in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, in which George Washington Hayduke tosses beer cans out his Jeep’s window. Many previously loyal fans couldn’t see past the littering, which they perceived to be hypocrisy, in either literature or actuality. But Sleight defends his old friend. “You can argue if it’s good or bad, but I think it’s great that he spoke out. In the short term, we can argue that our actions actually hurt the environment. In the long term, maybe it’ll change people’s minds. We need great enlightened minds. We need great people.



**“I would do it again.
And I would go down, like I’ve done.”**

“I would do it again. And I would go down, like I’ve done.” But going down has made quite a story. As the light fades on the porch, Sleight details the book he plans to write. “That book thing has been a joke all these years. I’m not going to get it done,” Sleight says with a nod. He’s made several references over the past couple days to the book he will someday publish, and this is the first negative one.

Jane clears her throat and seems defensive, for his stories; for him. “You could,” she offers.

“I would like to,” he says. “It’d be memoirs. I’ll tell everybody what I think. There’ll be some history. There’ll be some philosophy. It will tell all about this area, and people are going to be intrigued. But I get discouraged; I have so much to say. It’d be a book for my kids! All the damn people out there, they won’t read it, but I’d like to see my kids read it. And my friends. If it wasn’t for that, to hell with writing.” Jane nods, satisfied, and carries the melted sorbet back inside, refusing help with dishes.

Sleight takes a swig of beer and continues, “But writing, you always hope you take some of your thoughts and give them to other people. My beautiful thoughts, or my asshole thoughts, or whatever it is. I’m always cognizant of the young people. I would like sometime to be able to help convince the young people to do a hell of a lot better job than we did.”

He rearranges the four or five pens he keeps in his breast pocket, wrestling with this idea, as the moon pokes out and deer meander onto the back forty. He nods, steeling his resolve even against its repeated insufficiency and the walls of the dam. “The thing is, it’s a great life if you don’t weaken. Don’t weaken! So whatever I can give I will give. Even if you have to stand up and look like an asshole. It’s great! Everybody ought to go out on the street and look like an asshole once in a while.

“Honest to god,” he says. “It’s quite a feeling.”

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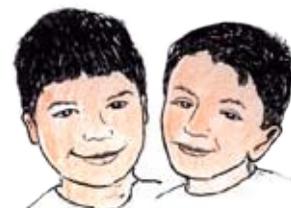
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'GLEN CANYON DAMN'...A HISTORY



I went West to find Edward Abbey in the 1970s, determined to give him a drawing I'd done in his honor. It was a doodle of Glen Canyon Dam in serious disarray. A few weeks later, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* appeared on bookstore shelves and I was one of its first buyers.

The jacket cover said Abbey lived in Wolf Hole, Arizona. I found it on the map and made the pilgrimage but he wasn't there.

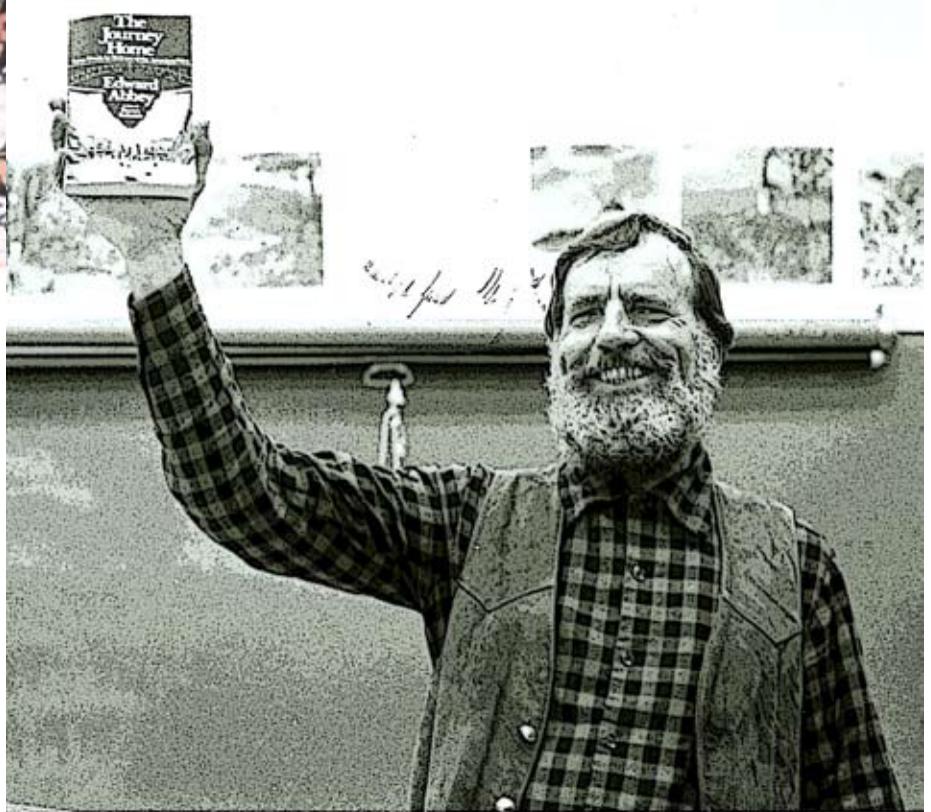
Nobody was.

Weeks later, I wound up in Moab, Utah and discovered Abbey had been living there all along, in a ranch-style home on Spanish Valley Drive of all places.

The Wolf Hole story was...a diversion (the bastard!).

Later I heard he played poker with some mutual friends on Wednesday nights and finally I was able to give Abbey my Damn Cartoon. He was gracious and kind and complimented me more than I deserved.

Months later, I got a letter from EP Dutton publishers in New York---they wanted me to illustrate Abbey's next collection of essays. Abbey was always trying to help out young writers and artists and I will always be grateful for his kindness and friendship...



(above) The 1979 version of the drawing.

(right) Still looking like Sonny Bono with my overpriced 'work of art.'

(far right) Abbey holding his copy of 'The Journey Home.'



The Rest of the Story...

After the drawing appeared on the cover of *The Journey Home*, there was some demand for T-shirts and prints and with Ed's blessing, I re-drew Glen Canyon Damn for that purpose.

Finally my original went in a drawer and stayed there for a decade.

In 1988, out of work and broke, I started displaying some of my cartoons and drawings at the Moab Mercantile and Gallery in Moab, owned and operated by my friends Kathy Cooney and Chuck Schildt. I was trying to peddle my stuff for two or three hundred bucks (framed) and not much was moving.

I wondered if my prices were too high. Maybe, Chuck said, you're not charging enough. I told him about the Damn drawing and he proposed we frame it and put some exorbitant price on it. We decided on \$3,000 and agreed that for every week it didn't sell, we'd RAISE the price by another thousand. We figured I'd hit Van Gogh prices within a couple years!

But one day, Chuck called to say he had a buyer. A 'representative' of a very

wealthy man in Colorado was sure his boss would want it. He said, "He wants to know if you'll come down in price, but honestly? Hold firm..he can afford this."

We made the sale--I got 60% and Chuck and Kathy got 40%..we felt rich!

And the buyer? I'd barely heard his name at the time. It was Bert Fingerhut. He would become famous for his extravagant donations to environmental groups like the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, the Grand Canyon Trust and the Wilderness Society. He would also sit on their boards of directors.

And eventually, he would resign from these boards and go to prison when he and another SUWA board member were convicted of securities fraud.

For years, I've given these green groups hell for taking money from 'rich weasels,' but when I was reminded of this story recently, I realized it was time for full disclosure.

So...yes, I once benefitted from Bert Fingerhut's wallet at one time in my life. I just wish his representative hadn't discovered my drawing until we'd jacked the price up by a few more thousand bucks.