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I STILL MISS MARTIN MURIE

It's been well past a year—January 28, 2012—since my dear friend and mentor and kindred spirit, Martin Murie passed away. For almost a quarter century, I often turned to him for support and advice and understanding the way a son looks to his father. We shared an unshakable love for the West and for wild lands everywhere. We understood that the West was more than the sum of its parts, and believed that its survival requires a deeper examination of our own lives and our culture—our 'civilization'—than most of us are willing to admit.

He was always there, no matter what the crisis or how difficult the problem. He understood that finding a resolution isn't often as critical as just the willingness to listen. He offered his advice and sometimes his criticism, with love and compassion. He was one of the best men I have ever known.

It's been hard for me to sit down and write about Martin. This has been one of those rare times when I struggle with the idea that an old pal is really gone. I don't mean to get mystical here but Martin comes to mind so often, I wonder at times if he isn't perched in a corner of the room, silently offering the support he gave so generously when he was here in the flesh. I like that idea.



I met Martin Murie almost 25 years ago. I had just started The Zephyr—I don't think I was more than a couple issues into the first year—when he introduced himself at the Main Street Broiler in Moab. In those days, Moabites were the poor survivors of the uranium boom that finally went bust in the early 80s. Many of my advertisers were as broke as I was and we all participated in a barter economy that I thought was perfect. As we ate our pre-paid burgers, Martin and I shared our first of hundreds of conversations. He had seen and read a copy of The Zephyr, liked it, and had sought me out to tell me. That's how Martin was. His

encouragement and optimism gave me the kind of confidence I needed to keep going.

Of course, I recognized the last name, 'Murie,' and asked if he was related to the great Mardy and Olaus Murie—regarded by many as the founders of the modern environmental movement. He was, in fact, their son and for his entire life, he would honor the family name in every way possible.

He had grown up in Jackson Hole, Wyoming and lived a life inextricably tied to the natural world. He loved every component, every morsel of it, both as a scientist and as a philosopher. And as a poet. But he also worried about our species' ability to live in harmony with it. He often spoke about the Big Picture.

In a Zephyr essay, he once wrote, "I offer, for discussion, that the Big Picture lies inside the work and discouragements and joys of people power. We can light out for that territory, the red heart of democracy...That democratic heart has to be kept beating, strong and steady."

He came to distrust power while paying a dear price for his patriotism. Martin learned the art of technical rock climbing living in the shadow of the Grand Tetons, so when war broke out in 1941, he joined the 10th Mountain Division. It would be a brutal experience that changed him profoundly. He saw unimaginable carnage, senseless destruction, and his best friends die at his side. Martin was seriously wounded and lost the sight in his left eye.

Remarkably, he emerged from all this a gentler man and a committed pacifist for life. But for Martin, whether he was defending the wilderness or campaigning for peace, it was still all part of his Big Picture. He wrote, "Do wars and economic disasters and climate change have anything to do with wilderness preservation? Yes, absolutely, because it is all one huge shebang, rapidly running out of control. Refusing to list polar bears as endangered is directly connected with the insane urge to grab every drop of oil on the planet, even in Arctic seas where polar bears try to adapt to ice melt and tundra softening, and these events are directly related to the military establishment whose use of oil is the largest fraction of our share of that dwindling, and precious, resource."

He may have been a pacifist but he had no problem being demonstrative. We shared our frustrations for many years. It was plain speaking at its finest. In the late 90s, Martin wrote the novel, 'Losing Solitude,' and when I proposed that he publish a regular column in The Zephyr under the same title, we truly bonded at the heart.

We traveled through some hard times, Martin and me, but I always felt better knowing we had each other's back. He could be painfully candid and disarmingly hopeful, all at once. I'd say, "Martin, how can you see the world so grimly and still stay so positive?"

He'd just laugh and say, "It's GOT to get better, right?"

He had no problem speaking his mind. In one memorable essay he noted, "Let's be clear about a few things. We live in a nation governed by stealth and secrecy that has launched us on a track that leads to Hell. It's time to become refuseniks, people who stick up for one another, refusing to be sidetracked by prominent spokespersons and news manglers who make up sentences that don't stand the test of logic or constitutionality or American underclass tradition."

We became the Unholy Duo of sorts when we found ourselves lone voices of dissent against mainstream environmentalism and its recent strategy to dig itself deeper and deeper into the pockets of the mega-rich. Martin complained that, "...money rules, and its rules are rigid...Rich moguls can give generously, and even

govern environmental organizations, feeling they are doing their part to save nature, just as they green their corporations with superficial changes that do not cut too far into profits.

"Corporations crow in public now, about that magic formula: that 'business as usual' and 'going green' can get along nicely. That's what keeps us from lifting a finger to actually slow our use of energy, slow climate change and the mad lifestyle we're all trying to adapt to."

We had already seen the first signs of wilderness 'Disneyfication,' even two decade ago, but as the recreation industry and environmentalism became more incestuous, his frustration boiled over.

"How," he asked, "do you 'plan' an adventure? Can't be done. There is no better way to lose contact with 'the wild' than this pernicious, money-driven treatment of human creatures as nothing but consumers of planned adventure, aka wreckreation."

Still Martin managed to keep a happy perspective on his own life and family. He and his wife Alison were together for more than six decades and raised three daughters. When he retired from his teaching job at Antioch College in Ohio, he and Alison bought some property in the backwoods of the Adirondacks, where they lived as close to the land as two people can. At 80, he was still chopping wood and slogging through two feet of snow and loving every moment of it. He walked the walk.



In the last few years, and especially after the Iraq War began, Martin spent much of his time devoted to the idea of Peace. First in Bangor and then in Ohio, where they finally re-located to be closer to their children, Martin and Alison dedicated each Saturday morning to a protest for Peace. They and a small band of friends and allies stood on a street corner with their banners and placards, hopeful that they might inspire just one more person to join their 'movement.' In his very last email to me and his last original Zephyr story, he titled it, "Bright Spot in Ohio."

Martin wrote:

"I make my rounds from corner to corner, stopping passing pedestrians to ask them 'Have you ever thought of joining us?' The replies are always interesting. Sometimes I say, 'Taking that step will change your life.' That is true. It takes a little gumption to take that crucial step, to show your face to passing cars and walkers of the sidewalks. Some blame the weather and I accept that. Sometimes rain or snow or cold makes the demo miserable. My parting shot is 'I'll look for you next Saturday.' Recruits are few, but steady -- this, after all, is a very small town -- they soon become 'regulars.' We have a drummer now that livens things up on even the most miserable day."

And then Martin proclaimed: "LET'S HIT THE STREETS."

Indeed. Nowadays, I miss his affable voice and the comfort it always brought me. We could all use some of his 'Hope grounded in Reality' spirit....Martin's Big Picture. I can hear him rallying us to look forward...

"Here's a revolutionary thought: Create an awareness that includes a finely honed ability to pay attention to the other creatures who are, as we are, full partisans in and of Nature. That alertness can extend to those of our own species, especially those who don't agree with us. I'll venture to say that a minimal requirement for the future well-equipped varmentalist has to be the fine art of listening.

"It would be a brushy path, hard to see very far ahead, but our feet would guide us. We might trust those feet. Along that path are ways of creating justice for all of our species and forward to full democracy, inside our movements as well as throughout our society. Then we can get together and work out dramatic, romantic (sure, why not?) and truly effective ways to begin to save the Earth."

Yes, Martin, old friend. "Let's hit the streets."

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15 YEARS LATER... THOUGHTS ON 'THE WILDERNESS MENTORING CONFERENCE OF 1998'

When I was five, we moved to one of the first suburbs in Louisville, Kentucky. Our street was smack in the middle of farm and forest land that, until we arrived, had changed very little in almost two centuries. One morning I looked out our bathroom window, across Miss Huntsinger's wheat field to the magnificent forest that lay beyond, and was confronted with an otherworldly scene. Lined bumper to bumper along the edge of the woods was a stream of bright yellow machines—bulldozers, earthmovers, road graders, dump trucks. In the next few days, they laid waste to the forest. Within months the new subdivision that replaced the trees was complete. It looked just like our street.

And so at age five, I became an environmentalist. I could not bear to see that kind of destruction and yet, a part of me knew that I was part of the problem. Like my dad said at the time, "The people that will live there are just like us. They need a home too."

As I got older, and entered that phase of young adulthood where everything becomes more black and white, and gray zones (and self-reflection) disappear, I became the kind of knee-jerk environmentalist that most "anti-environmentalists" love to hate. I joined all the right organizations, wholeheartedly supported every cause and walked in lock-step with my enviro pals.

When I started *The Zephyr*, almost 25 years ago, I was beginning to realize that my opinions were set more deeply in concrete than they had the right to be, and in the first issue of this publication, I stated my intent to offer all sides of the debate—sort of a broad spectrum forum. But while I think I stayed true to that pledge, it was always clear where my loyalties lay. I gave the local environmental group almost unlimited space in *The Zephyr* to present their point of view. They in turn, promoted my little rag as "the greatest newspaper in the world." I was quite flattered. Many thought *The Zephyr* was the print arm of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance.

And then in the late 90s, it all started to feel different to me. As the tourist boom/urbanization of Moab and the Rural West exploded, I began to doubt the purity of our cause. More than a decade ago, I decided to express those concerns as an "amenities economy" began to lay waste to the very land we sought to preserve. I thought "our side" needed to look in the mirror. But instead, I encountered deep resistance. None of my green friends wanted to talk about these kinds of impacts anymore. When I pursued the matter, they thought it was heresy---the discomfort turned to anger and then loathing. I went from ally to enemy in a matter of a couple years.

And so, my lockstep days were over. Since then, the "wilderness" issue has, for me, devolved into a political and economic battle between two competing industries for the alleged best use of the land. It has little to do with the qualities that the word is supposed to evoke—like beauty and space and solitude.

For me, the moral component in the wilderness fight was lost.

But why? What changed? At the outset, I admit to being more an idealist than a realist and I was never equipped to play the role of politician/dealmaker. Still, both then and now, the effort to preserve dwindling wilderness lands has been a moral and ethical issue for me and if there is a political/economic component to be exploited, I never felt it should be the driving force behind "the Cause."

But in the late '90s, something was different and I could never pinpoint the cause—if there was one. But from where I stood, the "crusade" to save wilderness had gradually become a sales pitch. In Utah, the economic component of wilderness became a prominent, if not the defining reason for passing a wilderness bill. Suddenly, the idea of wilderness and the legislative process to create wilderness diverged. I found myself on the outside, looking into a "movement" that I no longer recognized. It was never the same for me again and I couldn't understand where they (or I) had gone astray.

Jump ahead 15 years and the Miracle of the World Wide Web.

As much and as often as I loathe the internet, the medium does have its moments. Despite its overarching banality, it also has the potential to provide information that might otherwise be buried by the passage of time and the lack of access to the long-passed facts.

One day, a few weeks ago, I was Googling—just typing in names and organizations and places—to see what popped up. I typed in "wilderness" and "marketing." What appeared on my screen was a complete surprise to me. What it revealed to me answered my 15 year old question.

It was a web site called "The Wilderness Mentoring Conference of 1998." It was assembled by a group of self-named "mentors," professional environmentalists active at the time in organizations that reached from Washington DC to Alaska. This relative handful of New Environmentalists were frustrated by the movement's lack of progress in pushing and passing wilderness legislation across the country.

And so, On Memorial Day Weekend in 1998, according to the document that summarizes this event, "sixty-three people active in (or suffering a tenuous retirement from) wilderness advocacy

met at the Rex Ranch in Amado, Arizona, for the first Wilderness Mentoring Conference."

It included participants from national and regional environmental organizations coast-to-coast, including The Sierra Club, Montana Wilderness Association, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, and National Audubon Society.

And it included representatives of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA), including its then-Executive Director, Mike Matz. Matz would also preside over the conference as one of its mentors.

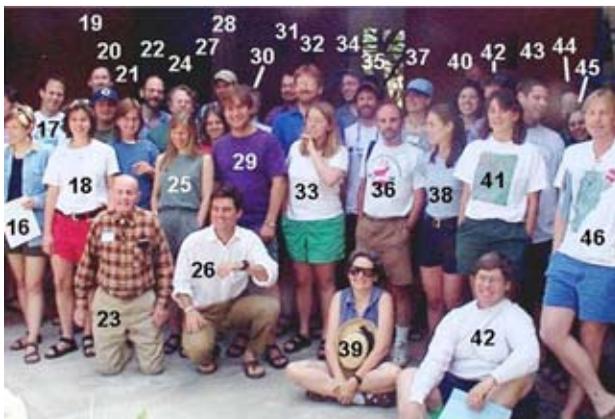
**SEE COMPLETE LIST OF PARTICIPANTS:
<http://www.jmccomb.com/mentor/participants.htm>**

The report of the gathering—the post mortem—was called "Building a Successful Wilderness

Campaign: Lessons from the 1998 Wilderness Mentoring Conference." It brought together, the introduction explained, "the last generation of 'closers,' those who know how to take an idea and run with it all the way to the president's desk, with a new generation of eager, thoughtful wilderness advocates. The younger generation was encouraged to think critically and to identify strategies, tools, and tactics for developing and leading successful wilderness campaigns."

A prominently displayed quote by Michael Carroll, now of The Wilderness Society, established the tone and direction of all that would come later:

"Car companies and makers of sports drinks use wilderness to sell their products. We have to market wilderness as a product people want to have."



**Get people's attention.
Use an unexpected messenger
to get your message across.
Do something unexpected
and unique. Gimmicks can be
very effective for capturing
people's attention..**

That, in its most succinct essence, was the theme of the conference. While the organizers of the event paid tribute to the wilderness activists who had come before, clearly the purpose of the meeting was to propose a new approach. "Although it is important to pioneer new wilderness strategies," the report explained almost as an afterthought, "we must do so with knowledge of what has come before." With that token nod to the "importance of history" and to the "philosophical and political contexts" of the wilderness movement, the conference explored the new territories of salesmanship, marketing and media manipulation to win the legislative wilderness battle. One might think you were being taught how to sell a new Buick.

The conference offered a plethora of ideas. Among them:

Hire a professional consultant.

Build a portfolio that contains your media clips.

Create relationships with reporters. Don't wait for reporters to come to you. Use smart lobbying skills when you speak to them. If you can, give them tips about good stories elsewhere. They'll appreciate it, remember you, and come back to you.

Widen your availability. Don't just aim for newspaper coverage.

Talk to local radio show hosts and see if they can interview you.

Videotape your congressional co-sponsor.

Use "Prepsponse." Call the media before you stage an event.

Hold a press conference. Anyone or any group can call a press conference. The trick is to have a hook that will attract the media.

NOTE: You can view the entire "Mentoring Conference Report at: <http://www.jmccomb.com/mentor/>

The conference explored the differences between a "defensive" and "offensive" campaign and it examined the fine art of lobbying both the executive and legislative branches of government. And most importantly, it emphasized: "Understand and use the media." They could not have put a finer or more meticulous point

on it...

"When you are learning to cook up a campaign, media are an essential utensil. In addition to using media strategically, you need to know how to market your cause effectively once there." Among its more important points:

* *Get people's attention. Use an unexpected messenger to get your message across. Do something unexpected and unique.*

Gimmicks can be very effective for capturing people's attention...

* *Use a catchy slogan. Use alliteration or a clever rhyme to make a slogan stick in people's head. For example, many years ago, the line, "Don't be a litterbug," made people more aware of their littering habits.*

* *Appeal to people's interests. Use marketing to let people know how a certain initiative will help them in particular. For example, get families' attention by talking about their children's future.*

* *Deliver your message using an unexpected source. Increase your credibility by asking a hunter or rancher to deliver a message of support to Congress or the media*

* *Ask experts to endorse your "product." Ask a scientist, a geologist, or any pertinent expert to help market your campaign. Maybe they will let you quote them or refer to them in an article or ad.*

* *Develop a spokesperson. Get people used to a recognizable, quotable, and believable spokesperson. If Joe Movie Star thinks saving the wilderness is a good idea and is vocal about it, his support might be enough to convince some people to back you. Who is a local hero in your city or town? Might he or she be willing to support your cause?*

* *Use other products to sell wilderness. Note the byproducts of protected wilderness, such as clean air, clean water, and pristine places to visit and enjoy.*

* *Contrast real wilderness with fake wilderness. Show how much better the real thing is than Disney or cyberspace, for example.*

* *Take back your leaders' quotes. Many companies that don't seem to have the best interests of wilderness in mind, such as ATV manufacturers, often cleverly use quotes of well-known wilderness advocates to sell their products. Use quotes (e.g., John Muir's) in a context that supports saving wilderness.*

* *Make it funny. People like humor. Make good-natured jokes about anti-wilderness initiatives. People also like the possibility of good times. Show people having fun in the wilderness.*

This was the Rosetta Stone. Until I stumbled upon the web site in April, I had never heard of the conference; nor did I know that my Utah friends had participated in it. Nor did I know that SUWA's executive director was one of its mentors. This is the moment where my friends in the wilderness movement in Utah took a sudden turn in a direction I had not even remotely imagined possible. The 'why' part had been answered.

"Gimmicks...Catchy slogans...ask a rancher to support you...get Joe movie star as a spokesman...Cleverly quote John Muir...Ask experts to endorse your 'product.'...Show people having fun in the wilderness."

It all came to pass.

Particularly ironic was the mentors' admonition, "Contrast real wilderness with fake wilderness. Show how much better the real thing is than Disney or cyberspace."

Since this was written, many of us have lamented the Disneyfication of wilderness. What better example than Moab's latest incarnation as the overhyped "Adventure Capital of the World, home of swing lines and zip lines and slack lines and every adrenalin-fueled recreational experience imaginable. The Mentors must be proud.

But what this conference created and what their report reveals is that, not only did the mentor gathering give its collective blessing to an all-out Disneyfication of Wilderness, its embrace of the strategies set forth in 1998 established the Disneyfication of the wilderness PROCESS as well.

This is where the heart and soul of the wilderness movement died.

One final note.

To put together an event like the Wilderness Mentoring Conference would have been an expensive proposition, even in 1998, especially at Rex Ranch Resort and Spa, in Amado, Arizona (south of Tucson). Affording the travel costs of 63 people from around the country should have been a daunting task. But the event had plenty of backing from some very deep pockets. REI, which had recently put future Interior Secretary Sally Jewell on its board of directors was a contributor. So were two mega-wealthy board members from the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance—Bert Fingerhut and Hansjorg Wyss.

At the same time Wyss and Fingerhut were engineering a dramatic shift in SUWA's wilderness strategy, it was injecting millions of dollars into SUWA's coffers, turning it from the bare-bones grassroots organization it had been, into a cash-flushed "business" with brand new offices and a million dollar payroll.

That was fifteen years ago. Maybe passage of the Red Rock Wilderness Bill is just around the corner, but so far, all that cash and all that flash have not served them well.

Maybe 'selling' wilderness isn't like selling a car after all.