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**‘OUR FRIENDS WERE DEARER THEN...’  
Herb Ringer...An Introduction**

I find it hard to fathom that almost 15 years have passed since my dear friend Herb Ringer left us, almost as long as the length of time we were friends. I met Herb in the late summer of 1981 and he died in the waning days of 1998. Both passages of time feel like a blink. He blessed me with the kind of friendship that rarely exists across generations, like a very special love between father and son. And, in fact, because Herb never had children, he once asked me if I could “fill in” as the son he never had. I always told him it was an honor.

He also bestowed upon me the role of the ‘keeper’ of his memories, magnificently told via the extraordinary collection of words and images he assembled in a lifetime. We offer a small but very memorable



portion of that collection in this very special issue.

Elsewhere in these pages, you’ll find a history of Herb as he told it to me and as I recount it here. And, of course, Herb tells his own story better than anyone. In this issue, you will hopefully examine and read and ruminate and marvel on the scores of new images and wonderful observations that we’ve posted from his original journals (and those of his father—Joseph Ringer). It’s like stepping into a Time Machine; at least that’s the way it feels to me.

But I’d like to offer a couple of postscripts here... one that occurred just days after Herb died, the other from a few days ago...

Herb’s health had begun to deteriorate in the

summer of 1998. In August, he gave up his home of 46 years and moved into a retirement center; he was almost blind from macular degeneration and he felt he had no other choice. But I feared that he’d lose his identity, if he walked away from the old Smoker trailer he bought in 1952. And indeed, within weeks,



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he declined rapidly. For a man whose memory meant everything to him, Herb must have felt like an alien to himself, as the history of his life ebbed away.

In late November, I spent some time on the phone with Herb’s doctor. Though there was no immediate cause for alarm, it seemed to him that Herb had lost the will to live. I wasn’t surprised. Later that day, I described Herb’s declining health to a friend.

“You know,” I said, “I think Herb is going to die on my birthday.”

He looked startled. “Why would you say that?” I shrugged. “Don’t know. Just a feeling, I guess.” But the feeling didn’t go away.

The next Zephyr press day was December 11, and I’d already planned an issue called, “Then and Now—the way we were, the way we are.” On the cover were two pictures of Herb. The first was a childhood image, taken by his father in 1917. The second was one of my own, shot the previous August when I helped him move.

On the morning of the 11th, I made the two hour drive to Cortez, Colorado, where The Zephyr was printed for 14 years. All day I was haunted by premonitions. In early afternoon, I loaded the last of the copies into the truck and raced back to Moab, convinced I’d find a sad message on my answering machine when I got home.

But when I walked in the door, the blinking red message light was dark. I breathed a sigh of relief and walked up to Dave’s for a cup of coffee. An hour later I came home to the blinking light I’d been dreading.

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That afternoon, I contacted the hospital and then the retirement home. A wonderful woman there, an RN named Patty who had taken a personal interest in Herb, helped me deal with all those “arrangements” that have to be made, when we are least capable of dealing with anything at all but our own grief.

A few days later, I had the most remarkable dream....

I was standing waist-deep in a swift clear mountain stream, but safely in the shallows and out of the current. Floating on his back in front of me and looking perfectly serene was Herb. Only my firm grip on his shoulders kept him in the backwater.

The banks were green and lush but mid-stream granite boulders disrupted the water’s flow and created eddies and swirls. It looked dangerous to me, but Herb wanted me to push him into the current. I argued with him, insisted it was too risky, but he just nodded and smiled.

“It’ll be okay, Jim...just give me a push.”



I hesitated again and he put his hand on mine and patted it.

“Okay Herb.”

I reluctantly released my grip and as he floated by me, feet first, I gave his shoulders one last push. The current grabbed him almost instantly and I watched Herb enter the heart of the stream. But as he passed one of the granite boulders, Herb was snared by an eddy and I watched with alarm as he spun in small circles near the rock.

“Herb!” I cried out. “Are you alright?”

But no sooner had I called to Herb than the eddy released him into the free current. As he floated downstream, Herb Ringer raised one hand and waved goodbye.

That remarkable dream has stayed with me all these years and is as vivid in my mind’s eye now as it was then. I’ve never known such clarity, in the image of the dream or its meaning. I still feel good about it. All these years later, Herb, via our times

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together and the photographs and stories he left me, never seems far away. Last week, yet again, I would swear he stopped by to say hello.

I have been spending as much as 14 hours each day, reviewing and scanning Herb's photographs and re-reading his journals. It's been such a pleasure and at times I've forgotten just how long ago he left us. One afternoon, he seemed determined to let me know he was still here.

In 1997, as Herb prepared to sell his trailer and move to the retirement home, I became the recipient of many of Herb's treasures. Among them is a beautiful Swiss-made clock that had been in the Ringer family for decades. He presented it to me one day, carefully showing me how to wind it with the brass key he kept hidden in its base. "Not too tight," he warned. He advanced the hour hand to the twelve o'clock position so I could hear the chimes. "Lovely," he said.

We carefully wrapped it in a cotton sheet and placed it in a box for the trip back to Moab. I set it on my bedroom dresser and for years I fell asleep nightly to the tick-tock of Herb's clock and its hourly chimes.



Then one day, it stopped. I thought maybe I'd forgot to wind it, but no...the clock quit ticking. I searched unsuccessfully for a clock repair person who might be able to revive my beloved Herb Clock, but finally gave up. It was still a beautiful contraption, even without its ticks, so I took comfort in just looking at it and remembering all the memories contained within in it. A decade passed.

Last week, it started ticking again. I walked to my dresser to dump some loose change and heard an almost familiar sound--- and could not believe my ears. Or eyes. The pendulum was swinging back and forth as it always had. The familiar tick was back. And last night, about 2 AM, it chimed.

I'm not quick to believe in the Otherworldly, but on this occasion I'd prefer to. I'd love to believe that Herb dropped by, gave his beloved clock a tap in just the right spot, and silently chided me, "I told you not to wind it too tight."

Next time Herb, I promise to get it right.

### STILES' ROAD RULES #43 'CONFESSIONS AND COMPLAINTS OF A LIFELONG JAYWALKER'

Herb Ringer drove a succession of Ford cars and trucks over a period of 60 years; by his own estimate, he covered about a million and a half miles and not once, did he ever run over anybody. Or at least anybody who didn't deserve to be run over. And yet, if there was ever anyone worthy of being run over by a fast-moving automobile, it's me. As long, that is, as everyone plays by the rules of the road.

I am, and always have been, an unhesitatingly consistent, even dedicated, jaywalker. I've been doing the jay for decades. My wife can't believe I've lived this long. I maintain that the shortest distance between two fixed points is a straight line (mathematicians will support me on this) and I have

adhered to that rule for most of my life. I still do.

Though as recently as last week, one of my readers gracelessly noted on a public comment page that I am "no spring chicken," I still retain extraordinary, even lightning-quick reflexes that would make a man half my age drool with envy.

Also, I have always lived in small rural towns where not only crossing a "major" street never posed a risk, one could lie down in the middle of it and rarely tempt bodily injury. When a few of these communities became busier and the risk increased, I simply moved.

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So last week, during a brief visit to Salt Lake City, we attempted to negotiate North Temple Street, from the hotel parking lot to our accommodations for the evening. I boldly suggested we avoid the unnecessary detour to the corner and the stop light and, instead, make a beeline for our destination. It may have been near rush hour.

When we arrived at the opposite curb, several minutes later, it appeared my marriage might be in jeopardy. "Are you crazy?" Ms T implored. "You almost got us killed!"

I really thought she was overreacting---making a mountain out of a near-miss mole hill as it were. True, on a couple occasions, the blast of compressed air from vehicles passing very close to our bodies almost lifted us off our heels and threw us into their wake. And indeed, it was a bit dizzying for a few moments, but we made it. It was an adventure in its truest form, in that neither of us REALLY knew if we'd survive the 105 foot journey. This is a significant difference from the *faux adventures* that have become such a popular component of 21st Century recreation. No zip lines for us. This is REAL danger.



**The Author  
preparing  
to jaywalk.**

(NOTE: In Moab, well-meaning recreationist/capitalists are spending a million dollars on a tunnel UNDER the river road, because its proponents believe bicyclists lack the intelligence and the skills to negotiate two lanes of traffic. I laugh at such meek behavior. Where, I ask, is their gumption?)

Besides, had the drivers of those vehicles on North Temple simply adhered to their rules of the road, there would never have been a problem in the first place.

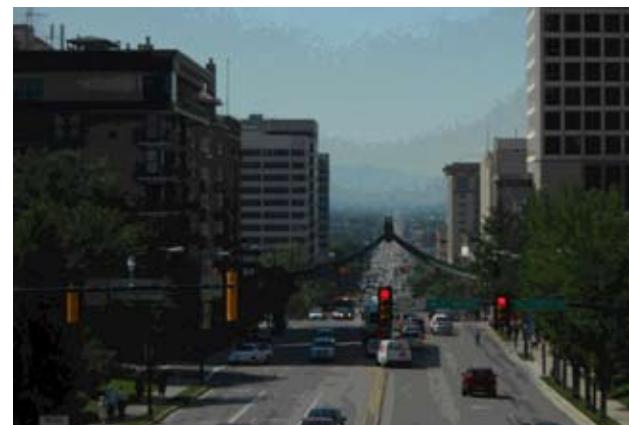
I do not mean to sound contemptuous of "good behavior" and recognize that trying to be helpful can, in some circumstances, be a good thing. But well-intentioned drivers are almost getting me (and now my wife) killed. I'm referring to those ill-ad-

vised Good Samaritans who, when they see me standing on the yellow stripe or negotiating a lane of traffic, feel compelled to suddenly brake in the middle of their lane and benevolently and generously gesture for me to proceed.

These selfless saints are a menace to the road far more than I am. Automobiles and the people that steer them are only obligated to brake for pedestrians at designated locations, like crosswalks and, of course, at stop lights and stop signs. Otherwise, they have every right to run over people like me. And, in fact, it's safer for everyone, including the pedestrian, for them to abide by that rule.

It is so easy to be seduced by the generous faces of drivers motioning me to proceed. And in my early jaywalking days, I was mesmerized by these benevolent acts. But on a four lane road, the kindness of a driver in just one of those lanes increases the pedestrian risk in the other three. I have almost been flattened by drivers who failed to notice or comprehend why a car had stopped suddenly in the adjacent lane and proceeded at full speed, as they should, to their destinations.

This, in fact, is what happened to Tonya and me as we sprinted across North Temple. A man in a Volvo



### The Ultimate Jaywalk Challenge... State Street in Salt Lake City

stopped, smiled and waved us on. You could see the compassion in his eyes. He was already patting himself on the back for his Good Deed of the Day when a plumbing truck in the next lane shot past him and almost snipped our toes. It was a close call. I glared at the kind man who had urged us onward and he seemed perplexed, as if he could not grasp the magnitude of his crime. Or that he had committed a crime at all. He'd almost got us killed and we were failing to display the proper level of gratitude.

Please understand, my words here are not meant to encourage more jaywalking, and only those pedestrians who possess the same lightning reflexes as I do should attempt this 'adventure' at all. This is intended to enlighten drivers more than walkers anyway. Any jaywalker who can't negotiate multiple lanes of busy traffic simply cannot cut the mustard.

Finally, when it comes to doing good deeds, I encourage it, but only ask that drivers re-direct their energies. If you're traveling down the road and you want to make somebody happy, find a little old lady and help her across the street. But ONLY at a designated crosswalk.

And only if she REALLY wants to cross it.

**WE NEED YOUR HELP.**

**PLEASE JOIN  
THE ZEPHYR BACKBONE.  
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