



cczephyr@gmail.com

1976: WHEN COLORADO SAID ‘NO’ TO THE WINTER OLYMPICS

In 2014, at a time when the American West is being transformed into one vast recreational venue, where every high-risk, adrenalin-induced sport pours more fire (and money) on the tourist/sport economy that benefits from it, where even BASE jumping is being touted as a possible Olympic sport of the future, it’s hard to grasp that there was a time when Westerners turned their backs on this kind of shameless and greedy exploitation. It wasn’t all that long ago, but it feels like it happened in a different world and era.

The XXII Winter Olympic games will begin in Sochi, Russia on February 6. Under heavy security and with unprecedented global coverage, the Games are expected to cost more than \$51 BILLION. Cities around the world spend millions just for the opportunity to bid as a host city for games to be played a decade from now. Like almost everything else, the original intent of the Olympics has been lost in the scramble for more “economic opportunity.” The Olympics are Big Business now.

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A half century ago, Denver, Colorado sought to bring the games to Colorado. For years some Coloradans had supported efforts and provided the funding required to win the nod of the International Olympic Committee; in May 1970, their perseverance was rewarded. Beating out other cities in Switzerland, Finland and Canada, the IOC announced that Denver and the neighboring Rocky Mountains would host the 1976 Winter Olympics. The politicians and the media were thrilled.

But many of Colorado’s grassroots citizens and at least one politician were not, including a young state legislator named Richard Lamm. Lamm had a seat on the Olympic

budget oversight committee and wondered if Colorado’s \$5 million share of the budget was more of a risk for the state than an investment. And he questioned whether the state’s commitment would stop there. Past Olympics had often blown out budgets and suffered staggering cost overruns.

Lamm and his supporters argued that the projected cost of the winter games had already doubled. And the geographical size of the Olympics kept expanding as well. Proponents had insisted that all game venues could be played within an hour of Denver, at facilities that had not even been built. As Reality set in, it was clear the Olympics would be played as far away as Vail and Steamboat Springs, creating an enormous logistical and transportation nightmare. How would the city transport tens of thousands of people to these venues, in the middle of the winter?



Richard Lamm

But there was a bigger issue here than balanced budgets and traffic logistics. Lamm and others considered what a massive global event like this would do to the state’s environment and way of life. In 1970, Colorado’s population was just 2,200,000. The state’s ski industry was in its infancy; Vail resort had not existed a decade before. Aspen was still an affordable place to live. The state’s residents felt protective of its resources (others would argue they were selfish) and the Olympic organizers failed to sense that mood. Lamm created a small grassroots groups called “Citizens for Colorado’s Future.” The organization had a lot of heart and passion and almost no money. But they managed to put the issue to a vote. Colorado’s residents

would have the final say—would the state finance the Olympic games or not?

Olympic proponents barely gave the insurrection notice. How could its citizens pass up such an economic opportunity? Surely not. But to be safe, they responded with an expensive media campaign to discredit the anti-Olympics movement.

But for once, heart and passion won. On November 7, 1972, by an overwhelming 60-40% vote, Coloradans rejected the Games. A week later Denver officially withdrew as host of the 1976 Olympics. The IOC, scrambling for an alternative, eventually chose Innsbruck, Austria to host the ‘76 games.

Colorado’s citizens, basking in victory and believing they may have indeed chosen “the road less traveled” for their state, a road that avoided the pitfalls of a booming economy. The movement’s leader, Dick Lamm, was propelled into the governor’s office just two years later. He ran on a platform of limited growth and promised to “drive a silver stake” into a plan to build a massive circle freeway around Denver. Colorado dreamed of a different future.

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But he was fighting a losing battle against Big Money and a culture that always wants more. All that Lamm and others hoped to derail by opposing the Winter Olympics happened anyway. And then some. By 2013, Colorado’s population had jumped from 2.2 million to almost 5.5 million and is the third fastest growing state in America. Colorado’s population will exceed 6 million in six years and reach 8 million residents by 2040. Its landscape and its soul have been transformed....transmogrified.

Even 15 years ago, Lamm knew it was over. In an interview with the now defunct ‘Rocky Mountain News,’ he said, “My disappointment is that the Colorado I was afraid was going to happen with the Olympics happened without the Olympics...I’m not apologizing for what we did. But nevertheless, I’m looking back on lost opportunity. I don’t like what Denver has become. I mourn Colorado. I am truly so sorry that Colorado has become what it has become when I had a different vision.”

Different visions. And the sad truth is, greed-free visions almost always lose.

HERE’S MY LIFE. HELP YOURSELF. As facebook invades our privacy, the rest of us keep giving it away.

During the holidays, Tonya’s mom came to visit and one evening we drove to a nearby community to look at the city park Christmas Lights. A few days later, I posted several images of our trip, including one of Tonya and Becky, on my personal facebook page. Later, as I perused the pictures, I noticed something odd. Beside the photo of my wife and mother-in-law, a caption read: “Tonya Audyn Stiles and Becky Morton.” There was just one problem; I

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JIM & TONYA STILES, publishers
PO Box 271
Monticello, UT 84535
www.canyoncountryzephyr.com
cczephyr@gmail.com
moabzephyr@yahoo.com

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Colorado Plateau Bureau Chief

DOUG MEYER
Contributing Writers
Martin Murie Ned Mudd
Scott Thompson Toni McConnell
Damon Falke
Herb Ringer Ken Davey

The Artists

John Depuy Dave Wilder

Historic Photographs

Herb Ringer Paul Vlachos Terry Knouff & Tom Till

Webmaster

Rick Richardson

didn't write the caption, facebook did.

How did this happen? I found this explanation, offered by facebook itself: "When you or a friend upload new photos, we use face recognition software—similar to that found in many photo editing tools—to match your new photos to other photos you're tagged in. We group similar photos together and, whenever possible, suggest the name of the friend in the photos."

So Big Brother is indeed watching, and a bit too closely for comfort, I'd say. It made me reassess, yet again, the reasons why I choose to stay on facebook and even contribute to it from time to time. I had avoided this anti-privacy pit for years, but when The Zephyr went exclusively online, my friends insisted that facebook was vital to my little cyber-rag's survival. And in order to create a page for The Z, I had to enroll myself as well.

In the beginning, eager to connect more people to The Zephyr page, I 'friended' almost everyone who contacted me, most of them Zephyr readers, well-meaning and mostly goodhearted. I found myself 'friended' by people I'd never met and still haven't met and will probably never meet. Hundreds of almost total strangers. Some have indeed become friends, in the real sense of the word. And in the second decade of the 21st Century, it is part of this new Reality that we will indeed find kindred spirits in people we will never look in the eye or share a handshake.



If the evil eyes we fear can't discover and exploit our secrets, why not just give them away? In one vast, collective, never-ending purge of our most personal and intimate details and emotions, that is precisely what we're doing.

But regardless of the depth of commitment in a facebook friendship, we all face this invasion of our privacy together. You'd think that might be the one issue that binds ALL of us. But does it? While we collectively fret over the sinister ways the Dark Ones are poking into our lives, we seem hellbent on beating facebook to the punch. If the evil eyes we fear can't discover and exploit our secrets, why not just give them away? In one vast, collective, never-ending purge of our most personal and intimate details and emotions, that is precisely what we're doing.

Our objections to privacy invasions are often as credible as Reality Show celebrities complaining about the paparazzi. For all our whinging, we seem to crave the attention that surrendering our privacy invites. For example, the facial recognition epiphany caused me to wonder if I should stop posting images on my page, or if the damage is already done. Do I really want facebook labeling my pictures for me?

But what about others? Do they want to be identified? How do parents feel about posting photographs of their children? Accepting a process that allows facebook to scan and analyze the facial features of every child as they grow up is a sobering thought. Imagine a digitized record, almost from birth, of the facial development of your own children. With your implied consent. Why?

The willingness to sacrifice the privacy of one's child leads me to other questions...

Why do we post personal photographs or share personal information with so many people, even if we call them 'friends' (in the facebook meaning of the word)? When Tonya and I got married, we found ourselves sharing our wedding album with hundreds of people we'd never met. Digging through the privacy options, we were finally able to limit access, but with facebook, it's an ongoing process, as they continue to alter the privacy settings.

If this were the pre-facebook era, how many of these same people would we be inclined to send copies of the wedding album?

Or why would parents post ANY photos of their children, regardless of available facial recognition software, when they're sharing these images with untold numbers of viewers? I know facebook users who have accumulated

thousands of 'friends.' But I cannot believe they know all these people well enough to call them friends in any real sense. Do they want to share their babies' first steps or first words with near total strangers? Would you walk up to people on the street and show them family videos? What's the point?

And while some facebook users keep accumulating 'friends,' many others don't bother to establish privacy limits at all. Instead they leave their pages 'public.' Why? Why would ANYBODY want to post every personal detail of their lives, and often their loved ones' lives, for the world, literally, to see?

Why do we allow ourselves to be 'tagged' on other pages? Why would any of us relinquish control of our own image or words or even our names to someone else?

Why do we allow others to add posts to our personal pages? On several occasions, I've belatedly discovered posts that were either too personal or too acrimonious to tolerate and I deleted them. Often these posts could at least have been sent as a message---why is there such a compulsive need to broadcast opinions on other people's pages? Why do people feel compelled to use a megaphone to ask a question, when there's a more personal way to achieve the same goal?

From the time I joined facebook, I've believed that one of its advantages is the opportunity to share information and thoughtful analysis. Much of the news I read comes via links to stories and essays that I find on facebook. But they shouldn't cause wars of words to break out. And if posted stories establish a difference of opinion, I would hope that the discussion could at least be civil.

But for example, when I provided links to some stories critical of President Obama's drone program in 2012, one of my friends went ballistic and accused me of "turning on Obama," as if I had betrayed decent people everywhere. Others thought I was supporting Romney. What became apparent after one long rancorous thread of angry comments was that virtually NONE of them had read the story. Their reaction was to the headline and not the thoughtful, intelligent essay I had hoped they'd read.

Finally, why do we feel the need to accumulate facebook 'friends' in the first place? Why do we seek to run up our lists, regardless of how remote or un-real the connection might be to them? What does it mean to be a facebook friend?

The primary definition of a traditional friend is still: "a person whom one knows and with whom one has a bond of mutual affection." Common synonyms include, "companion, soul mate, intimate, confidante, second self, and alter ego." How many of our facebook friends meet this criteria?

I recently saw a facebook thread where a fellow was



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agonizing over his declining friend list. How, he asked, could he see who was 'un-friending' him. Dozens of comments followed, offering ways to detect defectors. One woman, incredibly, knew exactly how many 'friends' she'd lost. Another urged him to abandon his effort, explaining that it would be "too painful" to know.

Why? How can losing a facebook 'friend,' especially when it's someone that would otherwise barely qualify as a remote acquaintance, cause such anguish? Recently, I've been scaling back my 'friend' list, not out of anger or bitterness, but because I simply do not know, or barely know, who many of these people are and I don't feel inclined to share the personal details of my life with them. I'm sure they are nice people who have real friends to talk to, just as I do. But I don't know them.

Sometimes I've un-friended people because I was uncomfortable with the amount of information about themselves they were making available. In an odd way, I felt voyeur-ish, even though it was their choice to be so visible.

And in a couple of instances, I ended facebook 'friendships' because I had nothing in common with people I'd first thought might share similar values. One person kept sending me messages long after I made it clear we weren't the kindred spirits she perceived us to be. I barely knew her but I tried to avoid the 'un-friending' process; in the end, however, disconnecting was the only way to stop the one-sided conversation. I just got tired of the messages. Call me mean and grumpy. I can live with it.

In the end, these issues are as much about what we are willing to give away as they are about what unknown forces are trying to steal from us. Don't get me wrong. I loathe the NSA, believe Edward Snowden should have been TIME magazine's 'Person of the Year,' (though I do like the Pope), and stand foursquare behind any genuine movement that opposes the demolition of our right to privacy. Most of us recognize and understand the threat, so why are we so willing to provide aid and comfort to the enemy? Because on facebook, that's what we do, 24 hours a day.

ON THE EVE of our 25th ANNIVERSARY...

Incredibly, this is the last issue of Year 25 for The Canyon Country Zephyr. Our first issue, Volume 1 Number 1, went to press on March 14, 1989, the same day that Edward Abbey died. It was a bittersweet day.

This is just a short note to tell you our April/May Anniversary Issue will, hopefully, be very special. For a quarter century, we have tried to be an honest and candid publication; we have also learned that honesty must often be its own reward, because it's not always welcomed when the information we provide contradicts the conventional wisdom of a particular mindset.

Consequently, we have been regarded as a very controversial publication. I am at work right now, writing the 'behind the scenes' story of how The Zephyr came into existence, how we endured several major bumps in the road, and why we choose to keep going.

I'd like to set the record straight, at least from my perspective, on some of the more contentious moments of the past 25 years, why we made the decisions we did, and ultimately, why we chose "the road less traveled." To do that, I intend to be as open as possible and include some of the correspondence, incoming and outgoing, that influenced our direction (I'm so glad I never delete my emails.). In any case, I think some of you may be surprised by the dialogue, or the lack of one.

As we end our 25th year, the state of The Zephyr is good. When we made the leap from print to cyberspace, many doubted we'd survive. I gave us a 50-50 chance. But after a shaky start, we are being read now by far more readers than we ever could claim in our print days. In 2013, more than 200,000 unique visitors paid more than half a million visits and perused almost 2.5 million pages. And support from our readers lately has been gratifying. More on that in April.

To all our readers and remaining advertisers and the people who keep supporting The Zephyr via The backbone, THANKS once again. See you next month...JS

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