

# THE ZEPHYR CHRONICLES

## PART 1 CONTINUED

our views would both remain intractable when it came to the fate of the Rural West. And that hummingbird nest? A few years later, as the tourist economy boomed, the tree outside Groene's SUWA office window was chopped down and another curio shop filled the space where the tree and the little park beneath it had resided.

### THE REST OF THE STORIES..

There was always more to The Zephyr than 'environmental issues.' especially in the early years when we were a monthly and so closely tied to the community. I realized that, as small as our little rag was, it could make a difference from time to time.

One day in late 1989, as I prepared to put the finishing touches on the last issue of the year, I received an anonymous note. It was regarding the "First Baby of the Year" contest, a tradition that survives today. But back then the rules were a little different. The note advised me to look in the lower left hand corner of the ad which ran in the local weekly. The type was so small I almost had to squint. It said: "Winning Baby Must be Legitimate." Here is, in part, how I responded in the next issue:

*Leonardo da Vinci was a great artist, inventor and a genius. Sarah Bernhardt was a great actress. Alexander Hamilton was the first U.S. Secretary of the Treasury. What does this diverse group of people have in common? Their parents were not married when they were born. To use the antiquated vernacular, they are "illegitimate."*

*If they were born in Moab, and if their birthdays fell close to the first of the year, all of them would be disqualified from the First Baby of the Year Contest, sponsored by almost two dozen Moab merchants. Each year, these sponsors award a variety of presents to the baby and the parents of the newborn. But the contest rules are explicit. The fine print reads: "Winning Baby must be legitimate."*

*I'm by no means disparaging the institution of marriage, but doesn't a new mother without a husband already have an enormous responsibility to bear alone? ...I wish the sponsors could re-evaluate their position and take another hard look at the rules... If it happens again this year (it has occurred in the past) and the baby is disqualified, The Zephyr and a group of local merchants including: Pack Creek Ranch, Main St. Broiler, Moab Mercantile, Hogan Trading Co., Dave's Corner Market, Four Corners Design, Rim Cyclery, The Movies and Moab Community Co-op will match the prizes intended for the baby. This is the time of year for compassion and generosity, not narrowmindedness.*

The sponsors of the event backed off, removed the stipulation and when the first baby of 1990 was born, she was the beautiful daughter of a working single mother. Sometimes, there is justice in this world.

There were other small victories. When we heard that the Moab Fire Department planned to expand its facilities on First East and cut down a 60 year old pecan tree, we came to the defense of the tree. The local ornithologist spoke up as well, saying the tree was vital to migrating raptors. And again, reason prevailed. The tree was spared. It's still there.

But more than anything else, the monthly interviews with the county commission and the city council were our greatest service to the community. Imagine every four weeks, being able to hold your elected officials' feet to the fire. We had our ups and downs, of course, and as I've mentioned, for a while county government became a bit aloof for my taste. But most of the time, there was a good rapport between The Zephyr and government when it came to open access, whether we agreed with each other or not.



ing decades later.'

Over the years, he'd visit me at Arches and then in Moab and we became like father and son. Then he started sharing his vast collection of Kodachrome images, thousands of photos taken over the past 50 years, and predominantly of the American West. When I started The Zephyr, it occurred to me I had an opportunity to share these images. For the past 25 years, there has rarely been an issue that didn't include "Herb Ringer's American West."

### WHAT ELSE...

People came and went over the years. The writer Robert Fulghum, author of the best-selling book "Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten," befriended The Zephyr for a while. He'd built a home at Pack Creek Ranch in the early 90s and took an interest in our struggling little rag.

At the time, I was still without a computer and when Fulghum heard of our predica-

ment, he immediately provided us with the funds to buy one, and a postscript printer as well. It was a great help and, for a while, Fulghum even signed on as a Zephyr columnist.

Perhaps the most enduring Zephyr writer (besides myself) was the inimitable Ken Davey. Ken came to Moab in the late 80s with his future wife Julie Fox. Ken established himself early-on as an irascible and cranky contributor, but rarely inaccurate. He was also my next day neighbor and we shared what can only be described as one of the most candid friendships I've ever known. Ken's columns not only informed the public and made people think, his acerbic wit diverted attention away from my rants and onto his, giving me a much needed break from whoever it was we'd offended most recently. Ken also wrote for the local weekly and the local television station, "Channel 6." I can lay claim to the fact that I named Ken the "Dean of the Moab Press Corps."



for years and he contributed untold numbers of morphs for our "Lame Alien Swimsuit Issues." It was such a great relief to sometimes escape the seriousness of the day and lose ourselves in Dan's great works of art. (And of course the cover of this issue is from Dan as well).

I surprised a lot of my old uranium miner friends when I helped initiate a plan to honor Moab's most famous citizen, the "Uranium King" himself, Charlie Steen. I've written extensively about Steen over the years and his son Mark, wrote an excellent history of his father in The Z years ago, but to remind you, Charlie Steen was a geologist from Texas who came to Utah convinced he could find uranium where it wasn't supposed to exist. Other geologists and government "experts" thought he was crazy, but Steen persevered. He was down to his last dollar and his last bit when he found the Mother Lode. He became an instant millionaire and a national figure. His fortunes rose and fell, he built a magnificent home on the cliffs north of town, then moved away, lost almost everything.

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One evening in early 1992, I was having dinner with Fulghum and his wife Lynn, Robert asked me why all the churches in Moab were in along the same street. I explained that Steen had donated that property to the churches back in the late 50s. A discussion about Steen's influence on Moab ensued and we both wondered where he was now. Fulghum said, "Wouldn't it be something to bring Charlie back to Moab?"

And I remembered that his Discovery Day was sometime in July 1952---this summer would mark the 40th anniversary. So I took the idea to City Councilman Dave Sakrison who loved the idea. He took it to the Mayor and Council and they loved it too. Later that year Charlie Steen came back to Moab. A dinner honoring him filled the Elks Lodge; friends came from all over the country to pay tribute. It was a very moving evening for everyone there.

During the dinner, the 'master of ceremony' Dave May mentioned the long list of people who had been involved in proposing and planning this event. When Dave mentioned me, every ex-miner in the room turned to me in shock, as if to say, 'YOU? You treehugger? You want to honor Charlie Steen?' My old buddy Neldon Lemon, with whom I'd spent many an hour arguing politics and the environment while munching burgers at the old Westerner Grill, came up to me afterwards. "Stiles," he said laughing. "I don't think I'll EVER figure you out." It was a good night.

The next day, Moab honored Charlie with a parade. Someone had found the original jeep that Charlie had used back in '52. Most of the town turned out. Later, we held a huge picnic for Charlie at the City Park and Mayor Tom Stocks proclaimed it 'Charlie Steen Day.' he also named the recently built park pavilion the "Charlie Steen Pavilion," but to this day, I don't know if the city of Moab ever installed a plaque.

But if some of Moab's miners softened their view of me a bit, there were a few women

in town who wanted to kill me.

When I started The Zephyr, I had created the 'cartoon ad' for almost all of my business supporters. It personalized their advertisements and they were funny and I didn't charge much. Everything was going swimmingly until I took a shot at drawing a woman. I believe it was Jane Dillon, then employed at Tag-a-Long Tours, who became my first... well... victim. Now keep in mind that I am a CARTOONIST, not a portrait painter. A cartoonist tends to exaggerate features while capturing the essence of the individual.



What can I say...Jane had/has a winning smile and when I tooned her she was smiling winningly. The result was a bit more toothy than Reality and way more toothy than she would have preferred. She did not believe I had "captured her essence." I would pay the price for years to come.

The Moab women were furious. How could I have savaged Jane in this way? What kind of a jerk was I? I tried to explain that it wasn't my intention to insult anyone. "Think about," I pleaded. "Advertisers are PAYING me to toon them. Why would I deliberately insult them? It would make no sense." But it was too late. Begging for forgiveness was ineffective. I decided that the only thing I could

do, to coin a phrase from Annie Oakley, was to "get back on the horse."

I started drawing Moab's most celebrated women, featuring them in full page features, but when I got too whimsical and titled the cartoons, "My Favorite Gals," I got them all stirred up again. So I changed it to "Moab's Power Babes." That didn't help much either.

It would take years for me to overcome the bad reputation I'd unwittingly earned for myself. I stayed away from cartooning and offered renderings instead. Exaggerating facial features was no longer an option. Eventually the Women of Moab forgave me. Note however that all these years later, I have still not cartooned my wife. I have grown wiser in at least one respect.

**1995...APPROACHING TERMINAL BURNOUT**

In addition to a growing fear of cartooning women, I was starting to show serious signs of burnout. The Zephyr had been, from day one, a one-man show in most respects. I had some great writers and for years, some typing assistance, but otherwise, I did it

myself. We printed a paper every four weeks. I'd spend a week walking the streets and talking to advertisers and collecting ad copy, a week gathering stories and conducting interviews, a week writing most of the stories and transcribing interviews, and a week putting it all together (cut and paste style), including those cartoon ads. When we were ready to go to press, I loaded the layout boards into my 1963 Volvo at daybreak and drove to Cortez, Colorado. I was usually back by late afternoon.

In the early days, we only printed 2000 copies and I would spend the rest of the afternoon delivering them to the 25 or 30 businesses where The Z was distributed. The next day, I'd print out the labels on an antique label printer used during the administration of John Quincy Adams and haul the bundles to the post office.

I got to rest for four days and then I'd re-start the process. I did most of this for seven years, though I did get some relief from a few kind souls who took pity and helped out with distribution and the subs. Still I knew I couldn't keep up this pace forever.

Also, in my heart of hearts, I think I knew that Moab was already committed to a direction and future I wasn't particularly fond of. It was relatively easy to oppose something monolithically large like a multi-million highway or a toxic incinerator. But how do you slow the insidious growth of tourism? And again, to repeat an old mantra, I didn't want to stop tourism, I just didn't want it to dominate the economy. Nor did I want the town to be transformed by out-of-town investors. I didn't like the idea of a "New Moab." I liked Moab the way it was—a nice mix of the old and the new. Again, as Bill Hedden had said, Moab was "a hard place to get rich, but a good place to be poor."

We had a new form of government and a new county council that was supposed to be "progressive," and it was in most respects. But none of them really wanted to oppose the Slow-Moving Juggernaut of an amenities economy and I wasn't sure my monthly warnings about the threat made any difference. My friends who had once loathed the changes brought by runaway tourism were beginning to have second thoughts. Unfortunately I wasn't. But maybe it was time for me to step and back, re-think The Zephyr, and try something different. Enjoying myself and doing something productive and worthwhile was a lot more important to me than making a lot of money.

I began to consider a publication that was broader in scope, that still focused on environmental, political issues of the Colorado Plateau, as well as its history, but could interest a wider readership. To do that I needed to dramatically boost circulation, but it cost money. I knew my advertisers would never tolerate a doubled ad rate, so I proposed a major change—The zephyr would increase its circulation from 2000 to 15,000, but we'd go from a monthly to a bi-monthly schedule. Ad rates would stay affordable and we'd reach a much wider readership, from Moab to Grand Junction to Salt lake City. It would be a gamble to see what happened next.

NEXT TIME: (1996-2001) The Zephyr goes bi-monthly.

**NEW BACKBONE MEMBERS** for December 2013/January 2014

**Michael Yates**  
Boulder, CO



**Scott Grunder**  
Boise ID



**Chris Carrier**  
Paonia, CO



**Sara Melnicoff**  
Moab, UT



**Becky Morton**  
Oakland, CA



**ALSO..The Un-Tooned  
New Backboners...**

**Barbara Brown**  
Idaho Falls, ID

**Keith Harger**  
Jackson, WY

**Garrett Wilson**  
Sandy, UT

**William Dunlap**  
Lake Oswego, OR

**AND THANKS TO  
THESE FRIENDS  
AS WELL...**

**Lewis Downey**  
Salt Lake City, UT

**Julie Zych**  
Milwaukee, WI

**David Wegner**  
Alexandria, VA

**Izzy Nelson**  
Moab UT

**Michael Bloomberg**  
Fenton, MO

**Lynn Curt**  
Salt Lake City, UT

**Linda Jalbert**  
GRAND CANYON, AZ

**Andrew McGregor**  
Glenwood Springs, CO

**AmeriCandy Co, Inc**  
Louisville, KY

**Catherine Lutz**  
Aspen, CO

**Kelly Rowell**  
Flagstaff, AZ

**Pamilla Bina**  
St. George, UT

**Patrick Flynn**  
Paradox, CO

**Rand Hirschi**  
Salt Lake City, UT