

From the 1991 Zephyr Archives

‘SOMEDAY ALL THIS WILL BE HISTORY TOO.’*Remembering Moab...Long Time Passing.*

Jim Stiles

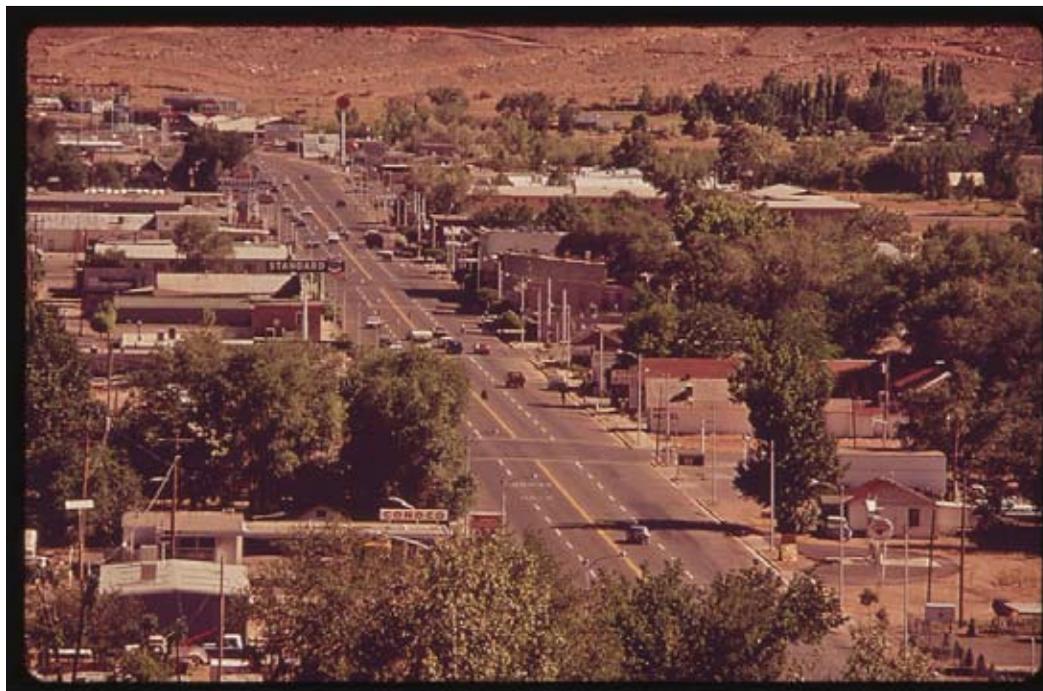
How things have changed in 16 years. The world has rolled over a few times since that August afternoon when I sputtered into town in a road-weary VW bus, determined to make Moab my home. I remember that day vividly. Although it was Sunday, Moab was as still as the desert that lay beyond those Wingate cliffs which stare down at the town. I was staying with Nelle Holmes, a wonderful woman whose step-son Maury was a friend of mind from a summer when I'd worked in Wyoming.

I decided to take a walk, from her house on East Center, down to Main Street and beyond to 1st West. Except for a few weekend gardeners worrying over tomato plants in their backyards, the town was quiet. I passed the old building that was home to Family Budget Clothing (now the Grand Emporium) and ended up at the Life Stream health food store, the only open shop I found all day. There, behind the counter, I met Conrad Sorensen, the store's owner (and now manager of the Moab Food Co-op). It marked the beginning of a 15 year

crusade, albeit erratic, by Conrad to make me eat right and give up my self-destructive junk food life style. I'm sorry to say he has failed miserably, although I recently kicked my popcicle habit in favor of Welch's Fruit Juice Bars (30% fruit juice in each quiescently frozen bar.)

After lingering in Conrad's store and getting the low-down from him on life in Moab in 1975, I loitered on Main Street for a while and then headed east toward Nelle's. I usually don't sense the significance of a moment until it has long passed, but on this particular afternoon, I realized something that is just now coming true.

As I crossed Main Street in front of Family Drug, (now the T-shirt shop,) I paused on the deserted pavement. I could have laid down for a nap, it was that empty. I looked up and down Moab's main thoroughfare, and I thought to myself...this is history. This



I'm huddled under a gnarled and ancient spruce, stunted by the 11,000 foot altitude and the wind that never stops. I'm waiting out a storm and hoping the next lightning bolt lands anywhere but beneath this tree. From my vantage point on this seldom visited mountain pass (you'll never pry its name from these sealed lips,) I can see a great portion of the sun blasted red desert country that I've loved for so long. From the Book Cliffs to Arches, from the Blues to the Bears Ears, from the Windgate to the Waterpocket Fold and beyond, to the Kaiparowits Plateau. Familiar names for remote places that should stay remote and untouched and unmarred.

Down in that maze of red rock are the people who, for a variety of reasons, have chosen this god forsaken desert to live their lives. It's not easy. To make a life in the canyon country requires imagination, perseverance, and a great deal of luck. But we stay because we love it here, and I think, in spite of ourselves, because we love

each other. Many of us refuse to admit it, but I think it's true.

There are a lot of people in Moab that I cherish as friends. And there are many more who I admire and respect, but because our political and environmental get in the way, we can't seem to bridge the gap that we've created.

I support wilderness in Grand County and Southeast Utah and that declaration alone can get a guy on more residents' "enemies list" than anything else I can think of. There is no group more

vehemently opposed to wilderness than the Western Association of Land Users. They oppose wilderness at all costs. It is a war to them—a mission from God—to keep these precious lands from being "locked-up" by a small cadre of Easterners and Bleeding Heart Liberals. With a few exceptions, WALU has no use for the likes of me.

As I crossed Main Street in front of Family Drug, (now the T-shirt shop,) I paused on the deserted pavement. I could have laid down for a nap, it was that empty. I looked up and down Moab's main thoroughfare, and I thought to myself...this is history. Someday it won't be like this on a Sunday afternoon, and I will long for this moment when the real world seemed so faraway, and the air was still, and even the light seemed softer and more golden.

is history. Someday it won't be like this on a Sunday afternoon, and I will long for this moment when the real world seemed so faraway, and the air was still, and even the light seemed softer and more golden. Where I could have stretched out on the Main Street asphalt and taken a snooze.

History.

This afternoon, a week after the August Zephyr went to press,

There was a time for me when the feeling was quite mutual. I regarded the anti-wilderness crowd scornfully. I had no use whatsoever for Ray Tibbetts who led the wilderness protest parade on July 4, 1980. Issues to me were very well-defined...very black and white. I was right and they were wrong.

But during many of those years, I worked at Arches, lived at the park and really didn't know the people who lived and worked in this town. All that changed six years ago when I turned in my

badge and bought a house and eventually started this paper. I am probably anti-social by nature, but the Zephyr forced me to go places and meet people I might have avoided like the plague

The Zephyr forced me to meet people I might have avoided like the plague otherwise. And what I discovered, as I set up interviews and walked Main Street looking for advertisers, was that many of the “enemies” I’d regarded warily all these years were (gasp!) kind, decent, honest people just trying to get by in this world. They were likewise shocked to see that I had no horns beneath my fedora either. I realized that they too long for quiet Sunday afternoons on Main Street.

otherwise. And what I discovered, as I set up interviews, and researched stories, and walked Main Street looking for advertisers, was that many of the “enemies” I’d regarded warily all these years were (gasp!) kind, decent, honest people just trying to get by in this world. They were likewise shocked to see that I had no horns beneath my fedora either. I realized that they too long for quiet Sunday afternoons on Main Street.

Since then, I’ve had to take another look at WALU, not for their political or environmental philosophy, but for who they are. For instance, how could anyone dislike Lilly Mae Norlander? I don’t care if she is against wilderness. She’ll never be an enemy of mine. Or Ray Tibbetts. We still don’t agree on development and wilderness, but we can talk for hours about the country we both love. Ray knows this desert better than most. There’s a deep cave “somewhere in southeast Utah” that drops like a shaft more than 300 feet into the rock. I made my way to the bottom of that pit a few years ago, and there on a wall in this black dungeon, our head lamps revealed three names and a date. In 1948 Ray Tibbetts was there. It was one piece of graffiti I found to be entirely appropriate.

Among “environmentalists” there is a minority of advocates who really do want to “lock-up” wilderness for their own selfish purposes. They are usually rich, live extravagantly, and ease their over-consumptive consciences by making large contributions to various environmental organizations. They are, in fact, not environmentalists but recreationists. We provide a playground for them and their toys.

And Jane Jones. Last month, her frustration came forth like a flash flood in her “Somewhere Left of Right” column. She thinks she’s spinning her wheels trying to find some common ground and I completely empathize with her. I know I’m repeating myself here (something my friend Wilson attributes to pre-mature onset of senility,) but somehow we need to remove the rancor and anger from the debate. What we need is a little honesty and sincerity. Let me make a stab at it.

Among “environmentalists” there is a minority of advocates who really do want to “lock-up” wilderness for their own selfish purposes. They are usually rich, live extravagantly, and ease their

over-consumptive consciences by making large contributions to various environmental organizations. They are, in fact, not environmentalists but recreationists. We provide a playground for them and their toys.

(I know that I get in trouble when I start making broad generalizations, and I’m fully aware that there are many wealthy people with hearts of gold who are only trying to do the right thing. Consider Franklin Roosevelt, John and Bobby Kennedy—rich men who devoted their lives to public service.)

But most of us environmentalists think we’re doing something noble and wise. We don’t think we’re driven by selfish motives at all. And many of us agonize over the conflicts that environmental protection creates. The fact that the environmental movement has failed these last 20 years to deal with human impacts caused by their actions has been its greatest failure. It was left a bitter taste in many mouths, including my own. And what about WALU folks...The two or three of you who read this “radical rag?” Some of my compadres think you are the group that’s selfishly motivated. That you are the greedheads. And let’s be honest, among your ranks, you know there must be a soul or two who are driven by the almighty dollar over anything else.

But I don’t see it that way. I see a group of people who have lived here for a long time, for generations, who are suddenly see-



But then comes another thought. Someday all this will be history too. What kind of world will we be living in when we look back fondly and nostalgically at 1991?

ing their lives turned upside down by a Brave New World that you neither want nor understand. You’re scared and you’re angry because you don’t know if five years from now, or ten years from now, there will be a place for you in your own hometown.

Well, I’m scared too. And so are a lot of other people who you regard as adversaries. We have a lot more in common than you think. We are, for the most part, two groups of honest, decent, people dedicated to a cause. One thinks it’s trying to save the last remnants of a continent that was once wild, and clean, and free. The other is trying to save the last remnants of a culture that has survived hardships and heartaches for over a century. I guess it remains to be seen whether either or both of our causes become nothing more than exercises in futility.

The rain has stopped up here on the pass and the sun is down over the Aquarius Plateau. But to the east, the high clouds still glow over Tukunikivats. In the shadows below, Moab bustles with humans on this Sunday evening, light years away from 1975.

But then comes another thought. Someday all this will be history too. What kind of world will we be living in when we look back fondly and nostalgically at 1991?