

## ZEPHYR CHRONICLES...PT 4

(CONTINUED)

cello? The Mormons will eat you alive!"

But almost everyone else was oblivious to my frequent back and forth trips to Monticello, as I transferred my life from Grand to San Juan County. I discovered, to my great relief, that while Monticello was close to 90% LDS, I was treated fairly and kindly by almost everyone in town. I may have been a Gentile and a heathen in the eyes of some Monticelloans, but at the very least, most of them seemed inclined to give me the benefit of the doubt. And I enjoyed the peace and quiet, though the bitter cold winters that began in September and lasted through May were sometimes hard to take.

But even if I'd been stoned by the residents, just getting to be the neighbor and friend of Gene Schafer made the move worthwhile. Gene was a whisky-sipping, non-Mormon auto mechanic who was...how do I put this...outsoken? I wrote a piece about the legendary Schafer and made this observation about my dear friend:

*"He's the most honest man I've ever known, which causes both chuckles, frowns and a squirm or two from a broad range of friends and adversaries. He grew up a Gentile in a community that is 90% Mormon; yet he has earned the respect of practically everyone, regardless of religion, because in the end, Gene Schafer is a straight-shooter. He never tries to be anyone but himself, and in this godawful time of political correctness and pained pretension, just his 'tell-it-like-it-is' approach to life makes him a unique and unforgettable man. He once told San Juan County's most celebrated curmudgeon/misanthrope that he, 'crapped too close to the house,' and not only lived to tell the tale, he made the guy laugh."*

**The link to: "Only Schafer Can Get Away With That."**  
<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/dec2003-jan2004/gene.htm>

Gene contained multitudes. He could be pretty abrasive and spoke his mind a lot more than some people would have preferred, but his kindness and generosity never had conditions attached. He didn't do good deeds because he wanted to be known as the guy who did good deeds; it's simply who he was. Once, when I had hit rock bottom and was drinking way too much vodka and downing way too many valiums, Gene came by to check on me. I staggered to the door, Gene took one look at me and said, "Damn Stiles...You look like shit." He shook his head, assessing my pathetic state and added, "I'm gonna go get you some steaks."

An hour later, he was back with an armload of red meat...just what Dr. Gene ordered. Knowing he cared enough to part with some sirloins made me feel better already.

Gene died in June 2010. Monticello has never been the same.



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**THE GREENING OF WILDERNESS...part 1**

In April 2001, I had first suggested that the environmental movement and its embrace of a tourist/recreation economy was creating impacts of their own, that most of us were unwilling to address. "It's Time to Look in the Mirror" was a seminal moment for me and this publication.

**It's Time to Look in the Mirror:** <http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/april-may2001/index.html>

Now, four years later, I was ready to take the debate a step farther, though the 'other side' did its best to simply ignore the questions. "The Greening of Wilderness" was one of the most difficult stories I ever wrote. Much of it would appear in a book I would write called "Brave New West." (More about that effort later).

In the introduction, I wrote:

*"When I first sat down to write the very long and difficult story that begins on page 12 of this issue, it was more than three years ago. The themes raised in this story have been nagging at me for even longer than that — I made my first attempt to discuss the changing urban west and environmentalists' shifting strategies in April 2001 with the 'It's Time to Look in the Mirror' edition. It received an extraordinary amount of feedback, the most in this publication's history, from a wide variety of readers. What it did not generate was any response whatsoever from the organizations*

*in the environmental community for which it was mostly intended. Since then, any attempt to discuss the concerns raised in that article have been met for the most part with, at best, stony silence and at worst, downright hostility.*

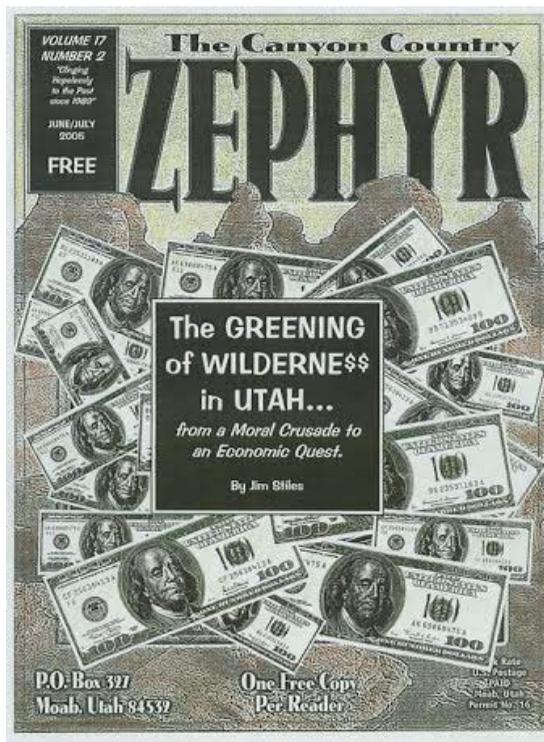
*"The reason I delayed this story for so long is that I was angry too. Writing from a position of personal hostility is not the most effective way to deal with problems, though I freely admit that I have been guilty of typing with angry fingers from time to time. It was hard to accept that after two decades of being a friend and partner to most enviro groups in Utah, I found myself cast as something of a traitor and even a pariah, simply for asking what I thought were honest, if also difficult, questions."*

**THE GREENING OF WILDERNESS:** <http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/june-july2005/index.html>

The long cover story addressed the history of wilderness in Utah, and attempted to explain how the strategies to preserve it had changed over the years. I concluded:

*"How can environmentalists escape the label of hypocrisy? How can we condemn oil exploration when our own consumption of oil is staggering? How can we condemn the impacts of motorized recreation while we turn a blind eye to the damage caused by ever-growing numbers of non-motorized recreationists? How can we heed Abbey's warning of Industrial Tourism when, at its heart, that kind of economy is the future many enviros have embraced for 15 years? How can we condemn the timber industry when we continue to build homes at an alarming rate that encroach on the habitat of the very wildlife we want to protect, and then construct them far bigger than anything we'd ever need to be happy? And when some of our biggest environmental contributors consume massive amounts of natural resources to build monstrous part-time homes, how can we possibly accept their donations?"*

*"Like a civil rights organization in the 1960s accepting money from a man who belonged to an*



***"We didn't fight for the rights of African-American men and women because there was a dollar to be made. Nor should that be our motivation as environmentalists to save wilderness. If we continue to follow this dangerous path, we may some day wonder if the Road to Victory was worth it... Or wonder what it is we actually 'won.'"***

*all white country club—these are the contradictions that destroy our credibility. And like the Civil Rights Movement of 40 years ago, saving what's left of the wild American West is a moral issue, first and foremost. We didn't fight for the rights of African-American men and women because there was a dollar to be made. Nor should that be our motivation as environmentalists to save wilderness. If we continue to follow this dangerous path, we may some day wonder if the Road to Victory was worth it...Or wonder what it is we actually "won."*

The response was unprecedented. Our Feedback page was tripled to accommodate the letters and most of them were supportive. One couple, Sierra Clubbers, briefly accused me of fabricating a letter they sent to the controversial Cloudrock developer Michael Liss--a letter I had published in full in the 'Greening' article. When I produced the originals, they withdrew their complaint and wanted the matter dropped, but since I'd never been accused of lying in the Zephyr before, I chose to print their original letter anyway. All of the correspondence is included below.

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/aug-sept2005/feedback.html>

SUWA had long since quit corresponding. In one last heated argument with Scott Groene, after he'd once again accused me of having an "anti-SUWA tirade," I got pretty upset and wrote in part:

*"It isn't 'anti-SUWA tirades.' My god, you just don't get it. I just want them to broaden their vision beyond cows and oil and jeeps. I remember you said ten years ago that it would 'really get tough when we have to fight our friends.' We don't have to fight them, just be able to speak honestly, and let the chips fall where they may. There's nothing courageous about being an enviro and standing up against oil wells. Anybody pc moron can do that. The fact that you won't even tell me where you stand on the topic is extraordinary. Why would an honest answer be 'trashing (your) friends.'?"*

*"Environmentalists are supposed to be visionary. We're trying to play a role in the future, beyond our own personal involvement in it. If we allow ourselves to ignore threats to that future, based on the fear of insulting a friend, then I think there's a problem...Anyway, I'm really disappointed that you can't discuss these issues without feeling like you're betraying friends. How shaky can these friendships be, if speaking candidly and honestly constitutes a betrayal?"*

**THE HIGH COUNTRY NEWS 'CURMUDGEON' STORY**

In 2006, writer John Fayhee wrote a cover story about The Zephyr and me for High Country News. While John sometimes revealed more about my personal life than I felt comfortable with, it was a fair piece. Best of all, he had taken the time to come to Moab and talk. In fact, we spent several days together, sometimes camped out (illegally) at a favorite Arches spot, and sharing a few adult beverages. In this regard, I feared I'd disappoint the author, as it was a well-known fact, then and now, that Mr. Fayhee appreciates a good libation. Still, he was one of the few who at least

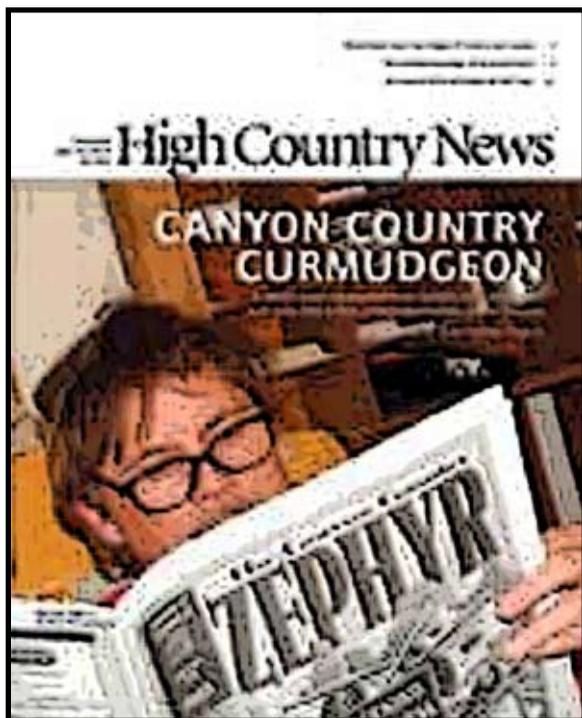
seemed to 'get' where I was coming from. He may not have agreed with my beliefs, but it meant a lot to me that he at least took the time to hear what they were.

John traced the history of The Zephyr, back to its 1989 origins, and the changes that occurred along the way. John wrote:

*"This would be a good place to stress that no one, not even Stiles, is accusing the environmental movement of premeditation in fomenting the amenities-based ruination of the West. Stiles knows as well as anyone that a host of forces have conspired to create this beast, from the global economics that torpedoed Southern Utah's uranium mining industry, to the Baby Boom's mass retirement, which is sending us a tsunami of second-home buyers. Nor is Stiles an apologist for the extractive industries; he feels there's a special place in hell for many ranchers and miners.*

*"But Stiles does believe that the amenities economy that defines so many 'New West' towns is as harmful to the environment as the extractive industries were. He contends that the environmental movement helped usher in that economy as an alternative to mining, timbering and ranching. And he says that the environmental movement can't come out and lambaste the New West economy, even if it wants to, because it is so invested in the argument that wilderness is the perfect economic engine for rural towns."*

**Fayhee pursued the matter with my old friends at SUWA who had little if anything positive to say about the publication they once called "The greatest newspaper in the world. Then-staff attorney Heidi McIntosh noted that, "At one time, The Zephyr was important." She explained, "I can't even read The Zephyr anymore...It's not relevant. It's not relevant."**



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Fayhee continued, "From the sidelines, it would be easy to dismiss all this as a family squabble, one that, for all we know, has roots in a softball game argument 20 years ago. SUWA has done its best to dismiss Stiles' writings as the product of an angry, even unstable man. 'It's like he's angry about something deeper and taking it out on us,' says McIntosh, SUWA's conservation director.

*"But that explanation cheapens Stiles' real point, which Groene ignored in the Tribune. That point is that SUWA does little to fight the threats that the New West economy poses to the Canyon Country. Instead, it pours its substantial resources into the decades-old fight to protect huge gobs of wilderness — a fight that, in Stiles' estimation, has gotten nowhere."*

When the long story finally appeared, in May 2006, my fall from grace, in SUWA's eyes, was a fait accompli.

**For the link to Fayhee's story: <http://www.hcn.org/issues/323/16321>**

The idea that Heidi McIntosh could make those kinds of personal observations about my mental state were downright bewildering to me, since, in fact, we'd never met. I wouldn't know Ms. McIntosh if I fell over her. And while I've had my dark times for sure, I was feeling particularly magnanimous when the story came out, so I wrote to Heidi, via email on June 2, 2006. The subject line read: "A sincere offer."

I wrote, "I finally read the HCN article and your observations; unless I'm mistaken, I can't recall that we've ever met. And if you don't read The Zephyr anymore, it could be that your opinions of me and the Z are second hand, at the very least.

"I've been arguing for years that the main reason America is so polarized these days is because we don't talk to each other---that we all base our opinions on perceptions more than reality.

I'd like to make an offer here. How about coffee or lunch sometime, either the next time I'm in SLC, or when you're down here? We could put aside contentious issues for another time and make the goal of this meeting just to get acquainted, and to show each other that neither wears horns or a straitjacket. I'm absolutely sincere in this and hope we can find some common ground."

I waited and waited. I still am, in fact. I never heard back from Heidi.

If there was one disappointment in the story, it was a concern shared by both Fayhee and myself. HCN's decision to describe me in the cover story title as, "The Canyon Country Curmudgeon" was, we felt, an effort to marginalize me as some kind of anachronistic old grump. And in publisher Paul Larmer's page 2 introduction to the story, he curiously gave Grand Canyon Trust executive director Bill Hedden the last word of sorts. "Our resilient community leaders," Hedden had written, "got in their row boat and went fishing for a little tourism to revive and diversify our economy. They hooked a great white shark." But the quote was from 1994. Few in the environmental community had come close to expressing such concern in years.

Still, Larmer noted, "Of course, if my kids' nostalgia is any indication, today's great white shark will seem like tomorrow's bluegill. In a few years, we may look fondly back at the good old days when you could still buy a house in Moab for \$300,000, when a mere 50,000 mountain bikers attended the Fat Tire rally, and when you only had to book a camping spot in Arches a year or two in advance...If we're lucky, though, we'll still have curmudgeons like Stiles around to keep us on our toes, and to remind us what it is we love about the West."

I was puzzled at the time, but later I would understand the last minute inclusion.

**Link to Larmer's introduction: "Nostalgia is a Moving Target" <http://www.hcn.org/issues/323/16322>**

**THE 'SUWA CAN YOU SPARE A DIME' INCIDENT**

At about the same time Fayhee was writing the HCN story, I'd submitted a short essay to HCN's syndicated "Writers on the Range," called "SUWA Can You Spare a Dime?"

**For the link to that story: [http://www.hcn.org/wotr/16196/print\\_view](http://www.hcn.org/wotr/16196/print_view)**

While my essay noted that, "SUWA remains Utah's most vigilant watchdog of off-road vehicle abuse, oil and gas exploration and public lands grazing," I was critical of their failure to address environmental impacts from the booming recreation economy. I proposed that, with its \$5 million in net assets, SUWA could share some of its largesse with smaller green groups that were not so flush with funds.

When the story ran in the Salt Lake Tribune, Groene demanded rebuttal space from Betsy Marston, the Writers on the Range editor. But when it arrived, she found the article so steeped in anger and vitriol that she asked Groene to remove them; she advised him to re-write his essay, without the nasty stuff, and re-submit. But he never did. Instead, he found a sympathetic editor at the Salt Lake Trib who would print the story "as is." It was a doozy. In part, Groene wrote:

*"Part of desert country's magic is that it nourishes eccentricity," Groene explained. "Jim is part of that, our own Barney Fife. He's worth having around though, even if we have to clean up after him now and again. Typically enough, Jim's rant says less about SUWA than about Jim's own curious little world. As its only resident, he's in charge. He gets not only his own opinion but his own facts."*

The Trib gave me a few lines to respond in its "Letters" section. "Now that I have had the gall," I wrote, "to disagree with some of SUWA's strategies and to suggest that it might want to share even a fraction of its \$5 million bankroll with other enviro groups, I appear to be in the doghouse. And with Barney Fife no less." More importantly, I recalled the words of Edward R. Murrow, who wrote, "We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. When the loyal opposition dies, I think the soul of America dies with it."

But there was no comment from SUWA and I wondered what its board members thought, so I sent an email to those I could reach by email, including Ted Wilson, the vice chair with CCs, Rich Ingebretsen, Terry Tempest Williams, and Bill Hedden. I only heard from two of them. Wilson sent a short and conciliatory note. Hedden responded at length. It would be the first of several combative exchanges over the next two years. While he thought Groene's comments were "unproductive," he believed my concerns could be de-bunked via pure logic. He said my ideas were "wacky," and even seemed to take offense at Herb Ringer's photographs in The Zephyr.

"In all your years of publishing the Zephyr and commenting on these issues," Hedden complained, "you haven't made any suggestions about how to solve the problem...how could you? what would they be? Appoint a benevolent dictator? Publishing Herb Ringer's photos isn't going to bring us back to some prelapsarian paradise."

I confess I didn't know what "prelapsarian" meant and had to look it up.

Hedden continued, "One reason that it has been hard to start a dialogue on this issue of the changing West is that nobody, including you, has anything constructive to say about it. People tried to politely look the other way when you decided to circle the wagons and fire inward, but Scott finally shot back." Clearly, nothing, not a single word or question I'd raised in the past five years had, in Hedden's estimation, had carried a scintilla of credibility. My criticisms had been reduced, yet again, to an angry and meaningless rant.

Bill insisted that environmentalists had, in fact, worked tirelessly to deal with the effects of the tourist/recreation industry. He said, "Turning to your assertion that nobody has acknowledged that there are New West impacts...I'm just puzzled. I have spoken about that earlier and more publicly than most others, and spent my time as a councilman working to help Grand County try to set policy on the basis of what was good for the people who live here rather than the desires of the tourist economy."

And yet, three years earlier, in a 2003 Zephyr interview with Ken Davey, Hedden seemed ready to throw in the towel. He told Davey, "We've had some of the most spectacular country in the world, and no one else in it. The fact that those days are just about over is sad, but there are many more people in the world, and they have found this place, and there's no keeping them away. Just regulating the wild places and putting in porta potties and hardening campsites and paving trails may deal with the impacts, but it doesn't help someone who knew that canyon when it was wild and no one else was in it. That's what I mean by the problem being insoluble."

I finally responded, "Consider the fact that, even through all this, with you challenging my honesty and Heidi McIntosh, who I've never even met, performing public dime-store psychological analyses of my character, and Groene's in-print temper tantrum, I have never attacked you or your character personally, or anyone's at SUWA---all I've ever done is raise honest and legitimate questions about the tactics and strategies of the environmental community. That's all I did. You may not

next page...

