

THE ZEPHYR CHRONICLES PART 4

'IT'S MONEY THAT MATTERS...BUT AT WHAT COST?'

(THE GREENING OF WILDERNE\$\$)

JIM STILES

The much anticipated Millennium came and went; Y2K didn't happen; the world would not start to fall apart in earnest for another 20 months, and I saw The Zephyr, as an economically viable business, peak... and then start a slow decline.

As Moab's transformation into a New West town accelerated, and The Zephyr continued to express concern, the less inclined new businesses were to support us. And honestly, how could I blame them? The Zephyr was consistently opposed to runaway growth. I could accept and even enjoy tourism as a part of a more diverse economy, but this was something different. It was more than a transformation; it was a transmogrification.

I had already seen some nervous advertisers who took no comfort in our message and, as early as 1995, efforts to boycott The Zephyr and our advertisers had started. In one of my more defiant moments, I wrote, "If you're an advertiser in this paper and you abhor the bizarre collection of opinions expressed herein, if you believe your association with this publication is destroying your reputation, if you think that the Zephyr has destroyed the local tourist economy by single-handedly altering international travel trends, then I think you have no choice but to withdraw your advertising immediately." But, I warned, "remember this: if we really do have the power to alter international travel trends, we also have the power to turn you into a toad. Fair warning."

By 2001, our ads had slipped some but not enough to jeopardize our existence. Part of the problem was the closing or sale of longtime loyal advertisers. Kyle and Carrie Bailey had supported The Z via their video rental store, "Movies of Moab," since issue one. But when City Market expanded its inventory to include a video rental department of their own, at much lower prices, the Baileys couldn't compete. One day I went down to their store, only to find a recent movie poster and a closed sign taped to the window. The poster was for the film "Rude Awakenings." It was surely that, for many of us.



Another good case in point was Jim Sarten, the owner of North American River Expeditions. Sarten loved The Z and had been a loyal supporter for 14 years. But when he finally sold the business to a company called OARS, out of California, the ads stopped. I contacted the new company rep, who explained to me that after looking at The Zephyr and the advertising money they were spending (\$59 every other month,) OARS concluded there wasn't enough "ROI" to justify the expenditure.

I didn't know what "ROI" meant. OARS explained it to me; it meant "Return on Investment."

Even Pack Creek Ranch was forced to end its affiliation with The Zephyr after 17 years. Ken and Jane Sleight had been a part of The Zephyr since the beginning. But the ranch had become more difficult to operate and they had sold some of the cabins and the properties;

now PCR was collectively managed by a homeowners' association. Jane warned me the matter of ads was up to the HOA and she gave me the contact info for the spokesperson—she was in Boston—to ask about future participation in The Zephyr. The manager explained she had never heard of The Z and would have to get back to me. A few weeks later, I finally got a reply. The ads would end, she explained, because The Zephyr did not fit their marketing strategy. Again, the dreaded ROI.

To make my own situation worse, I kept turning down other potential revenue sources. For example, one of my favorite ads was for the Grand Old Ranch House. Before it became a restaurant, it had been a flop house for seasonal rangers, back in my Arches days. I'd met Ed Abbey there for the first time, prior to one of his notorious poker games where he was regularly fleeced by his good friend TK "Tom Tom" Arnold.

In the late 70s, Moabites Glen and Katie Victor had bought the old home and renovated it. For more than a decade they had been wonderful and eager Zephyr supporters. We had great fun with their ads, even once appealing to North Dakotans to come eat at the Ranch House. (Apparently a review of their guest register indicated a shocking lack of customers from up north.) Glen ended up being interviewed by a North Dakota radio station.

One day Glen called me up to say they'd sold the place, but that the new owner was eager to con-

outbuildings and creating the Moab Springs Resort and condominiums, I didn't know what to do. I had already struggled with my own ad hypocrisy on one level. But this was something new and I handled it poorly. McKay asked me to call him soon to discuss the ad and I simply failed to get back to him.

After the next issue went to press and his ad wasn't in it, McKay called me. Awkwardly, I explained that I didn't feel comfortable with his ad, and with the radical changes at the Grand Old Ranch House. As much as I loathed his project, I didn't want to hurt his feelings. I'm sure I did anyway and I don't think we ever spoke again.

And then there were the local businesses that just plain hated me and The Zephyr. Several times in the last decade, as the town's tourist infrastructure grew faster than demand could match, some Moabites organized boycotts to kill off The Zephyr. They insisted that my "anti-growth and development" attitude was negatively impacting international travel trends.

In 2000, a group calling itself "Pro-Moab" sent a bogus letter to my advertisers. It was badly written—just the punctuation was offensive, and they didn't even spell my name correctly—but it was an attempt to drive away the businesses that supported The Z. And, in one regard, it worked. Many of the new businesses chose not to advertise and, as I've already said, how could I blame them?

In reply to the letter, I wrote, "As long as humans have breathed, there have always been tragic individuals within the species who are slaves to the almighty dollar. Who fall to their knees at the sight of it. Who can NEVER satisfy their voracious appetite for it. And who hate ANYONE who isn't similarly infected. What a wretched way to exist on this beautiful planet...Fortunately, most supporters of The Zephyr share my outlook. We like the dollar, but we're not blinded by it. Money is a means to an end, not an egomaniacal end unto itself. We want to make a living—but NOT a killing. And we want to have a LIFE. Not just a job."

A REPLY FROM JIM STILES TO THE "LETTER FROM FRIENDS OF THE ZEPHYR" ("with 'friends' like these...")

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/dec2000-jan2001/friends-reply.html>

BIG MONEY COMES TO THE GRASSROOTS GREENS...

One day, I told then-SUWA staff attorney Herb McHarg about my financial dilemma. He asked me how much SUWA was paying for its ad. "Nothing," I said. In the ten years I had been providing space for their "Watchdog" page, I'd also given them a free ad. I thought they were in the same boat as me—poor but dedicated. Herb laughed and said, "They can definitely afford to pay for their ad." And then some.

Until now, I had been oblivious to SUWA's newfound wealth. For years the grassroots group had struggled to make ends meet, but had found honor and integrity in their bare-bones operations. Now, SUWA was experiencing a sudden injection of money from billionaires like Swiss industrialist Hansjorg Wyss and multi-millionaires like Bert Fingerhut. Wyss bought them a new office building and renovated it, at a cost of more than a million dollars. Salaries jumped dramatically. Suddenly SUWA had a million dollar payroll.

I was oblivious to all this. I printed my first essay on the subject, "The Rich Weasel Factor in the New West," in 2000, but I still hadn't realized the extent of the influence of these mega-wealthy. And I didn't know until my conversation with Herb McHarg that they'd infiltrated the boards of even grassroots environmental groups.

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/blog/2012/03/12/from-the-oct-2000-archives-the-rich-weasel-factor-in-the-new-west-stiles/>

The change had been dramatic. Just a couple years earlier, Groene wrote a piece for The Zephyr honoring SUWA's former executive director, Brant Calkin. In that passionate essay, Scott wrote about money and environmentalism and his friend Brant:

"Brant offered his staff low pay but lots of autonomy to 'do good and fight evil. The benefit of lousy pay is you get to experiment.' Calkin offered low wages because no environmentalist should be in it for the money, and 'pay doesn't affect the quality of the staff.' He offers as rationale both that environmentalists have an obligation to spend their members' money wisely, and that small salaries ensure that only the passionate keep their jobs."

When he wrote the piece, Scott had left SUWA, but he would later return and become its Executive Director. At the time he was critical of the growing salaries being paid out. He wrote, "Brant never asked his staff do anything he wasn't already doing. For example, he and Susan Tixier earned a total annual salary of \$20,000 between the two of them as Director and Associate Director, about a third of what the current SUWA director makes now."

Link to BRANT CALKIN...by Scott Groene:

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/archives/brant-calkin.html>

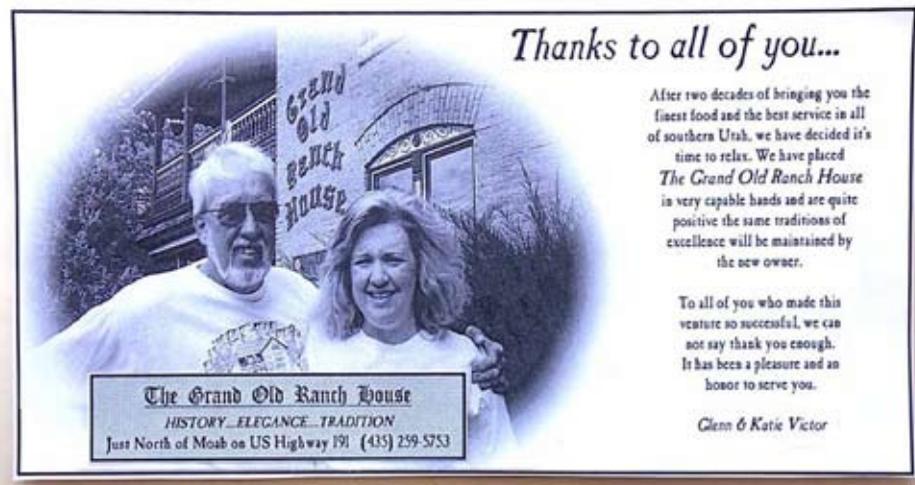
Now, unknown to me, until McHarg explained it, everything had changed. Herb even offered to mention my name to one of the new SUWA benefactors. He was sure there was some way they could give The Zephyr a helping hand and channel some bucks to me. But I declined the offer. I did start sending SUWA a \$144 bi-monthly bill for their ad, but within a year or two, I no longer felt comfortable with their financial support either. In February 2001, my relationship with SUWA, via its regular column and the ad, came to an end.

MY INTRO TO BONDERMAN, WYSS & FINGERHUT

Hansjorg Wyss was just one of several mega-wealthy individuals who had recently begun to play a dominant role in Utah environmental politics. In exchange for massive donations, Wyss and others secured positions on the boards of directors of SUWA, the Grand Canyon Trust and national organizations like The Wilderness Society. Another powerful contributor was Bert Fingerhut. Like Wyss, Fingerhut became a major contributor to many environmentalist groups and joined the SUWA and Grand Canyon Trust boards as well.

Here I must make a full-disclosure. In the early 2000s, as ad revenues began to decline, I looked for new ways to generate some revenue. I created the Zephyr Backbone, which allowed readers to contribute as much as \$100 to the cause. In the first year, we received a check for \$100 from Mr.

The Zephyr continued to express concern about Moab's 'New West' Transformation, the less inclined new businesses were to support us. And honestly, how could I blame them?



tinue or even expand the ads. I asked if the place would be maintained as it was, and as it had been for the last century or so, but they were vague about his plans. "Let him explain," they said. The Victors arranged for me to meet the new owner, McKay Edwards, a few days later.

McKay was and is a good man, but when he told me about his dream of tearing down most of the

Fingerhut. But the following year, citing financial constraints, the multi-millionaire advised he could only offer half—fifty dollars.

But that wasn't the only time I profited from Mr. Fingerhut's wealth. Years before I started The Zephyr and after I'd quit the Park Service, I was out of work and trying to make some money selling some of my drawings at the recently opened Moab Mercantile (where the Slickrock Café is now.) Kathy and Chuck Cooney were its owners. The only work I'd ever done of note, artistically, was my rendering of Glen Canyon Dam, blown up. It appeared on the cover of Abbey's 'The Journey Home,' and I'd sold quite a few on T-shirts in the '80s. I still had the original and we decided to put it on the wall with a ridiculous price—\$2000—with no real thought of selling it. We hoped seeing it might stimulate customers to consider the lower priced drawings. Chuck and I decided we'd raise the price by a thousand bucks every week, no matter how it went.

But one day, I got a call from the Cooneys; there was a man in the gallery who knew a guy, a very wealthy guy, who might be interested. I came down to meet him. He was a pleasant fellow and not rich himself, but his friend was. He said, "He wants me to try and dicker with you on price, but believe me, he can afford \$2000." The next day, I sold my beloved 'Glen Canyon Damn' drawing to Bert Fingerhut I'd never heard of him at the time, but in the years to come, I'd hear plenty.

In 2007, Fingerhut and another SUWA board member were convicted of securities fraud and went to jail. In the August 2007 issue, I wrote:



"On May 13, Bert Fingerhut pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud. According to the Wall Street Journal, Fingerhut 'made \$12 million over the past decade by trading in the IPOs of mutual savings banks. He targeted banks that were about to go public and used the names of friends and relatives to open accounts at the banks.' He targeted over 65 banks. He was already rich...how much more did he need?"

"As part of the settlement, he agreed to return \$11 million in illegally obtained profits and faces 57 to 71 months in jail. Sentencing is in September. U.S. Attorney Christopher Christie said, 'Fingerhut used his Wall Street acumen to concoct a cunning scheme. He made millions by robbing everyday depositors of an opportunity to which they were entitled and deserved.'"

The story was barely covered in the Utah mainstream press and SUWA's director declared that Fingerhut's problems were not connected in any manner to SUWA. A few months later, another SUWA board member, Mark Ristow, was also indicted, convicted and sent to jail for the same crime.

SUWA's Bert Fingerhut goes to jail

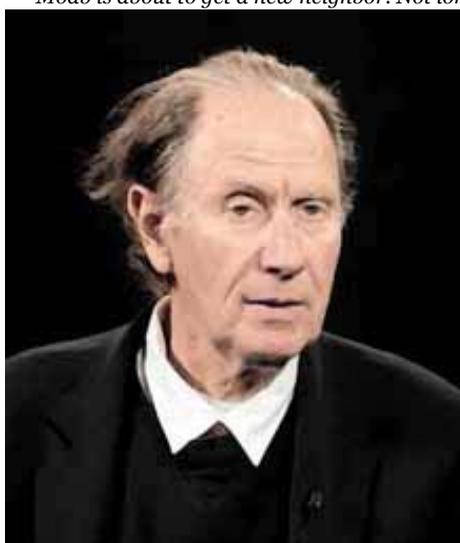
<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/aug-sept2007/takeleave.html>

Another SUWA board member goes to jail

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/dec2007-jan2008/takeleave.html>

But neither Wyss nor Fingerhut could hold a candle to David Bonderman. One night I was with a SUWA board member who was still mildly sympathetic to my concerns about Wyss. He said, "Wyss isn't a bad guy...do you know who David Bonderman is? Now THAT's somebody to get angry about." I learned quickly—Bonderman was/is the multi-billionaire venture capitalist and founding partner of TPG Capital. TPG invests in everything from real estate and coal-fired power plants to oil exploration to palm oil plantations around the world. But he also contributes heavily to 'green' groups and sits on, of course, several boards of directors. And when he first came onto my radar, he'd just turned 60 and had marked the occasion with a party in Las Vegas. For the night's entertainment, he hired the Rolling Stones. The event set him back about \$7 million. Chump change for Bondo.

In 2006, I noted Bonderman's recent move to Moab, or at least the start of construction on a new 15,000 plus square foot home, near the Moan Sloughs, to complement his mansion and estate at Aspen. I wrote:



"Moab is about to get a new neighbor. Not long ago, I was driving down Fourth North, past the hospital and was surprised to see a crew planting pine trees along the fence line. Not a couple of trees. Or ten. And not little seedlings either. These were mature thirty foot pines and there were hundreds of them. Later I learned the number of transplanted trees, including pines and fruit trees, was closer to a thousand and that the cost of moving them was about a million dollars. And since pines aren't native to Moab and don't exactly thrive in its blistering heat, a couple of local truck drivers now have almost permanent jobs hauling water to keep them alive."

"The man with the trees is David Bonderman, one of the wealthiest men in America. Bonderman founded the Texas Pacific Group, a private equity firm based in Fort Worth.... FORTUNE claims that in the world of private equity firms, 'David Bonderman is as dominant as they come. He has earned a reputation as a master dealmaker, a tornado of a man spinning equal parts brilliance, energy, and charm inside his ever-moving vortex...Bonderman's high-profile deals have given him a mystique. He's the man who can close the sale, and his secretive style only feeds his aura. People may not see how he does it, but they see the results. The stealth isn't just a matter of personal preference. Bonderman has learned it's much easier to conduct business far from the prying eyes of the media, stock analysts, and the public.'

"But David Bonderman will tell you that he is an environmentalist, if donating a relatively small portion of a \$6 billion fortune can make anyone an environmentalist. He has served on the boards of the Grand Canyon Trust, the Wilderness Society and the World Wildlife Fund for years. Grand Canyon Trust president Charles Wilkinson told FORTUNE that, 'He's one of the country's greatest conservationists right now.'

"So welcome, Mr. Bonderman. A big Moab 'Hello HOWDY!' There's always room for one more simple man of the land, here in red rock country. A living role model for all of us environmentalists."

Some Moabites were disturbed by Bonderman's arrival, but others, especially those financially benefitting from his frequent donations, were livid. One, the leader of a well-known grass roots group proclaimed, after reading the story, that I should be "drawn and quartered."

In the years to come, I'd write frequently about Bonderman, Wyss and Fingerhut, but especially Bondo. Some of my readers, annoyed at my persistence, would complain, "Why do you keep picking on those three guys? There are lots of 'rich weasels' out there." My answer was always the same—"Because I don't have the time or resources to 'pick on' all of them." And no one else in the media would touch the subject.

LOOKING FOR THE HUMOR IN IT ALL...

This was a very depressing time. Just a few years earlier, I had felt I was part of an honorable cause. Our motives were clear and sincere and selfless. We were working for peanuts and proud of it. I admired and appreciated my friends and was happy to be a part of something that had meaning and clarity. Now everything had changed. Now 'saving wilderness' was about boosting the tourist economy. Now, even grassroots groups were funded by people who, just a few years before, would hardly have been considered allies. I had become a pariah.

Still, I tried to avoid wanting to slash my wrists ALL the time, and turned to humor when I could, to alleviate the sting. I started putting together some issues that poked fun at the situation. One cover story paid biting tribute to OUTSIDE magazine's never-ending "Top 10 Secret Cool Places" themes. Our Top 10 took a different slant that included the White Mesa uranium mill in Blanding, the Arches National Park gravel dump, and the hidden 'Juniper Graveyard' at the Island in the Sky in Canyonlands. I wrote:

"Before the early 1980s, when the road to Grandview Point was still a narrow dirt track, the trip was dusty and slow. One of the reasons the trip took so long was because it was rocky and rutted and you couldn't go very fast without rattling all your teeth loose. Another reason why it took so long is because the road went around trees and followed the topography of the terrain instead of going through it (and them)...Of course, when the NPS finally and reluctantly paved the road, it took out most of the curves and leveled the dips and humps."

"As for all the juniper and pinyons that the new highway went through, they ended up at the end of a service road near the Green River Overlook. The Tree Graveyard used to be much larger; in fact, it covered several acres. Now, in fact, the NPS is using the same trees it killed as protective fences at overlooks to regulate pedestrian traffic! So over the last two decades, the pile has been reduced somewhat, but the graveyard still speaks volumes about modern highways and the ease of travel in the 21st Century."

April-May 2002online issue: The Top Ten Secret Places of the Canyon Country

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/april-may2002/index.html>

Then in August, I followed up with: "FIVE NEW EXTREME SPORTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY." I was quite impressed with my list that included "Colonic Floss Tug-of-War, "Oral Anchor Bolt Pulling" (for all you rock climbers,) and my favorite—"Body Pierce Belaying."...



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"...Do you have body pierce rings all over your body? Have you been wondering if they have any functional value (other than the fact that they just look so gosh-darned good? Do you want to put your rings to the test? Well here's the opportunity of a lifetime! Yes, it's the tri-equalizing Body Pierce Belay anchor. "Brad" volunteered for this hazardous yet strangely stimulating task, because he is already adorned with two of the three anchor points that are absolutely necessary to perform this task properly and safely. The ear and nipple piercing points are real! We merely had to add a fake nose ring to perfect this extremely distasteful simulation."

August-September 2002online issue: Five New Extreme Sports

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/aug-sept2002/index.html>

The off-the-wall stories caught the fancy of the footwear company TEVA; a representative contacted me, interested in running a series of full page ads. They were under the impression we were like this all the time. Yet again, I looked all that money in the eye and decided full disclosure would be necessary. I wrote back, with a fuller description of The Zephyr's priorities and links to a few stories about the recreation industry that had previously appeared in The Z. Sad to say, I never heard from TEVA again.

GOIN' SOUTH...

Trying to find the absurdity in all this, I vainly attempted to convince myself that if I could just look at the dramatic impacts and the changes in geologic time, the upheaval wouldn't seem nearly as catastrophic. But there's little comfort in geologic time. What I was watching was the transformation of my home. Finally, one day in August 2002, feeling especially desperate, I decided to leave town.

I was passing through Monticello, 55 miles south of Moab, and a chip-seal project on Main Street diverted me east a few blocks. A 'For Sale' sign in the front yard of a tiny, tree-lined cottage caught my eye. It was offered by Lex Realty and I stopped by the office to learn more about it. Bennion Redd, a lifetime resident of Monticello and one of the most decent men I've ever met, told me that the house was owned by his sister and brother-in-law; Doyle and Marilyn came down to the office and we dickered on the price for about a minute. We shook hands and Bennion said he'd do the paperwork and we'd close in about a month.

I told very few people about the move, and those I told were incredulous—"Moving to Monti-

next page...