



WAVING HANDS REVIEW

Literature and Art of Northwest Colorado



JOSEPH LANSING | *Last Chance*

Volume 9 • Issue 9 • 2017



In Northwest Colorado near Rangely is the Waving Hands pictograph site. Believed to be of Fremont origin, the site is named for a life-size pair of disembodied hands painted on a sheer sandstone rock face. The hands are mysterious. Are they welcoming or warning? Drowning or emerging? Celebrating a victory or pleading for deliverance? No one knows for sure, but the waving hands are arresting and thought-provoking, and remain a distinctly human statement in a remote wilderness.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL MITCHEM



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Literature and Art of Northwest Colorado

Volume 9, Issue 9, 2017

EDITOR Joe Wiley

ART EDITOR Jeffrey Grubbs

PRODUCTION/LAYOUT Sue Leo

COPY EDITOR Lee Stanley

Waving Hands Review, the literature and arts magazine of Colorado Northwestern Community College, seeks to publish exemplary works by emerging and established writers and artists of Northwest Colorado. Submissions in poetry, fiction, non-fiction, drama, photography, and art remain anonymous until a quality-based selection is made. Unsolicited submissions are welcome during the academic year between September 15 and February 15.

We accept online submissions only.

Please visit the *Waving Hands Review* website at www.cncc.edu/waving_hands for detailed submission guidelines, or go to the CNCC website and click on the *Waving Hands Review* logo.

The staff of *Waving Hands Review* wishes to thank President Ron Granger, the CNCC Cabinet, the Rangely Junior College District Board of Trustees, and the Moffat County Affiliated Junior College District Board of Control. Thanks also to those who submitted work and those who encouraged submissions.

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Editors' Choice Awards

Artwork: John Willey for his photographs

Non-Fiction: Deborah Miles Freitag for *The Enigma of Fuzz*

Fiction: Tamara Grubbs for *Canyon*

Poetry: Samantha Wade for *Window*

Shepherd Carvings on the White River Plateau

By ANDREW GULLIFORD

I wasn't looking for aspen art or carved aspen trees. I wasn't thinking of sheep or shepherders or their movements through the forest. We were looking for something else: an ancient Ute Indian trail that wound across the Flat Tops on the White River National Forest, the second-oldest federal forest in the nation, set aside in 1891. We knew where the historic Ute Trail began, near the confluence of the Colorado and Eagle Rivers at Dotsero, Colorado, but we did not know where it ended.¹

"Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky.

We fell them down and turn them into paper that we may record our emptiness."

—KAHLIL GIBRAN



ANDREW GULLIFORD | Woman's Torso

A nude woman's torso, carved by a shepherd, can be found on the Buford-New Castle Road just as the road climbs the ridge south from the White River.

During the course of that summer more than 25 years ago, we hiked, rode horseback, and took a small silver Cessna airplane high above the canyon system that creates the Flat Tops Wilderness, the second largest in the state. We were looking for signs on the ground of an ancient Indian trail, but we found another trail system that overlapped the Ute Trail. Towards the center of the White River Plateau we found something different, equally forgotten, but in more recent use.

We found a historic sheep or stock driveway used by Hispanic herders to move their flocks through the forest without arousing the ire of local cattlemen. After 1881 when the Utes had been pushed out of most of western Colorado and forced onto reservations in the far southwest corner of the state at Ignacio and onto a reservation in Northeast Utah at Fort Duschene, stockmen quickly moved in. They brought vast herds of scrawny, Texas Longhorn cattle and sheep from New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. The sheepmen and the cattlemen sparred for decades over grazing rights. One of the solutions that forest rangers devised was to establish stock driveways so sheep could move from low elevations in the winter to higher elevations in the summer without lingering too long on cattle ranges.

We found a historic sheep driveway directly overlaying the historic Ute Indian trail. As I began to walk from the New Castle-Buford Road, the one gravel road that cuts south to north across the high plateau, I knew this was a different landscape. From

the pines and firs that spread across the forest, I had entered an aspen grove and began to see carvings with 20th century dates, names, and initials from generations of herders. I was stunned by graphic depictions of sex — "aspen porn" — repeatedly carved into the white bark of aspens by lonely herders.

Sheep had grazed the high-altitude grasses near Meadow Lake, always under the watchful eye of herders and their dogs, but here in this one grove of trees the sun-filled meadows gave way to an aspen canopy, and herders had left their messages, their signs. Little grass remained because flocks had moved through the trees nibbling the grasses, and at a steep ascent to the west they left a bare dirt trail as dozens of sheep had flowed up the steep slope.

In the dappled light from the quaking aspens, I realized I was in a unique cultural landscape, a male enclave of private messages left by herders for other herders, including the carved dates of all the years they had led flocks through this part of the forest. I saw the names of uncles, fathers, and sons. Some trees were dead and the original carvings dark and obscure, the bark having aged and peeled. Other carvings became hidden under spruce boughs, so I had to proceed slowly, looking at the larger trees, going around to different angles, always reveling in the smell of an aspen forest, the patches of light and shadow, the wind lightly turning leaves.

I realized that like aspen leaves becoming golden and cascading down in an October breeze, these tree carvings represented ephemeral art. The trees would fall and be forgotten, yet herders wanted to leave their marks. Watching the sheep,



ANDREW GULLIFORD | Woman's Figure

This full-length figure is up the Snell Creek Trail on Snell Mountain in the White River National Forest. The author rode horseback to the site with Dan Schwartz from Ripple Creek Outfitters.



ANDREW GULLIFORD | *Herder Inscription*

On one of the White River Plateau's major stock driveways south of Meadow Lake, an inscription from Gus Halandras from July 12, 1975, stands near other inscriptions.

the shepherds could never take the time to carve through the bark of spruce or fir, and at lower elevations there's nothing to carve in sagebrush country, so here was their message board at this exact spot on the stock driveway.

Patterns began to emerge. Most of the carved aspens were at least 8-12 inches in diameter, and many were much larger. Herders wanted others to know they hailed from El Rito, Taos, and Farmington, New Mexico; Chile, Mexico, Spain and Peru. They left exact summer dates when they carved on the trees — 7/9/52 for Joe J. Gonzales and 9/9/63 for Jean Bellet, a Basque from Spain.

They laughed and made fun of each other. On one tree Manuel Valdez had carved his name, and the next year a herder had carved *El Loco* below it. In addition to the ubiquitous sex scenes, there were also carved crosses left by Catholic believers. Julio Cordova had passed this way in 1946 and Alberto Vigil in 1958. They left messages for other male herders about their homes, about women, always signifying their presence: I am here. This is me. I have returned. I saw the names of prominent sheep families from near Meeker, Colorado, in Rio Blanco County — Gus R. Halandras carved on 7/12/75 and so did John Halandras. I began to wonder about Greek herding traditions as well as those of Hispanic herders. Some must have carved on horseback because of the height of the inscriptions, but how did they get their horses to stand so still?

There were nicknames — Nino Trujillo and Rosy Aguirre as well as Jesus Baca, Jim Atencio, Ricardo Manzanar, Charley Shields, and Hector Bruno who

fancied himself as “El Tigre” from Peru. I learned which trees to look for by tracking sheep signs, looking where the grass had been bent down and finding carved trees in the middle of those grazed areas. Hiking longer and higher than I had anticipated, I took out a knife and made a walking stick by smoothing off the boles on a sturdy piece of weathered pine. Stick in hand, I kept walking west through the forest, trying to understand the lonely shepherders' lives and their insistence on not being anonymous, of leaving their names, dates, and hometowns. I began to think about becoming a voice for the voiceless, to write about sheep herds, sheepmen, and the herders themselves.

I had to learn what were natural black markings on an aspen tree and what could be human-etched designs. It took a while to start to see the designs, to have the awareness that this was a carved tree and not a random accident of nature.

I realized I'd found a secret in the forest, a passageway into a world of work, a type of occupational folklore. I wondered how many groves could be found similar to the one I was in.

As a deer and elk hunter, I often find carvings, but it would be years before I would try to research and write this hidden history of sheep in Colorado, to try to understand The Woolly West with its unique ethnic flavor distinct from the lore of cowboys and cattle.

Herders also rode horseback, but they kept their dogs close, lived in tents or sheep wagons, not log bunkhouses, and only infrequently saw another friend or *companero*. I came to realize that although cowboys occasionally carved on trees, herders always did. It was part of their tradition, and it is ongoing today with new generations of Peruvian herders that I have met and befriended in the White River National Forest.



ANDREW GULLIFORD | *Repito's House*

Hispano sheepherder Repito from Taos, New Mexico, left his distinctive carved houses, often with smoke arising from a chimney, on aspen trees across the White River and Routt National Forests.

When I stopped to photograph a sheep wagon along a forest road, a young herder came out to welcome me and to practice his English. With my *poquito* Spanish and his tentative English phrases, we could communicate. We also made use of his Spanish-English Dictionary published by the University of Chicago Press. I inquired about carvings.



ANDREW GULLIFORD | *Peruvian Carver*

A young Peruvian herder photographed in Sept. 2015 proudly stands near a horse's head that he recently carved on an aspen tree. He also etched a happy portrait of his Anatolian sheepdog (pictured below). Across the American West, Basque, Greek, and northern New Mexican shearers have been replaced by herders from Peru.



On his cell phone he showed me the photo of a horse's head that he had just carved, and I asked to go see it. He took me, and I could see the recent scratches in the tree, the distinct shape of the horse's head and its ears. "Buena," I told him, and he smiled. We talked a little more, and then he gestured to the sheep. He said it was time to move them, the sun had moved across the horizon, and he rode off on horseback with his guardian sheep dog far ahead.

So I'm learning from today's modern South American herders about recent carvings on aspen trees. But 25 years ago, I simply stared in awe at the carved trees and decided that someday I would want to learn more

about herding traditions, about aspens themselves, and about lives spent moving through forests. Now that time has come as I try to find groves of carved aspen trees in Colorado and to learn about herding patterns and sheepmen's stories across the state.

Carved aspen trees are cultural resources requiring documentation by archaeologists, although rarely are aspen groves recommended for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Instead, they are mapped and photographed and the records kept as part of the Colorado Cultural Resource Survey on a Historical Archaeology Component Form. Archaeologists write down the inscriptions both on USFS land and also lower elevation groves on Bureau of Land Management or BLM land.

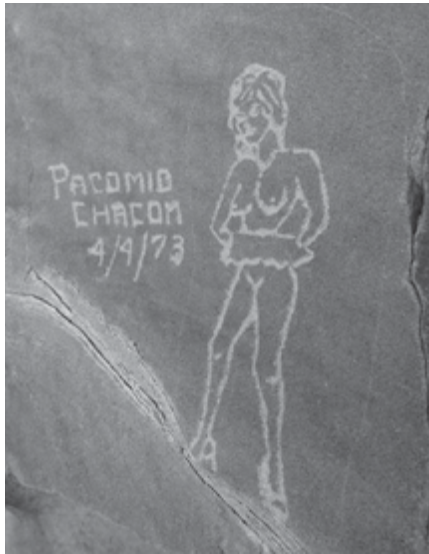
Near McCarthy Gulch, Willard Rasmussen carved his name in 1936 as did Roy Gionino on August 22, 1936. Rasmussen carved his name again two years later, and Roy Gonzales also carved on the same tree in 1938. Palacios carved in 1931 and Domingo in 1940 on two trees near Corral Gulch. M.D. Serano from Canjilon, N. Mex., carved in June of 1929. Ruben Leyba, also from Canjilon, carved on July 31, 1942. Other names and dates stretched to 1988. In addition to Hispanic herders, Basque shepherds liked Ricardo Zuizarreia carved in 1957.²

I've found carved aspen art or arborglyphs on Clark Ridge towards New Castle, up Snell Creek towards Snell Mountain, on Ripple Creek Pass, and on the east side of the Flat Tops in the Routt National Forest off Pyramid Trail #1119 and Trail #1200. Names and dates are important historical records, but on the White River Plateau, I've also found a true artist among the aspen trees — Paco Chacon, whose carvings of women were so carefully done that they have become collectible, especially by families in Meeker.

I never met Paco Chacon, but I have followed him through the forests. In the 1930s he worked as a shepherd in the Uncompahgre National Forest and on aspens I have seen his long, flowing script and excellent penmanship. In one



ANDREW GULLIFORD | *Jumping Horse*
Jumping horse carving located on Ripple Creek Pass.



KEVIN DOTSON | *Pin-up Girl* 1973

Rangely HS and CNCC alumnus Kevin Dotson photographed this Paco Chacon etching near Trujillo Draw in New Mexico.

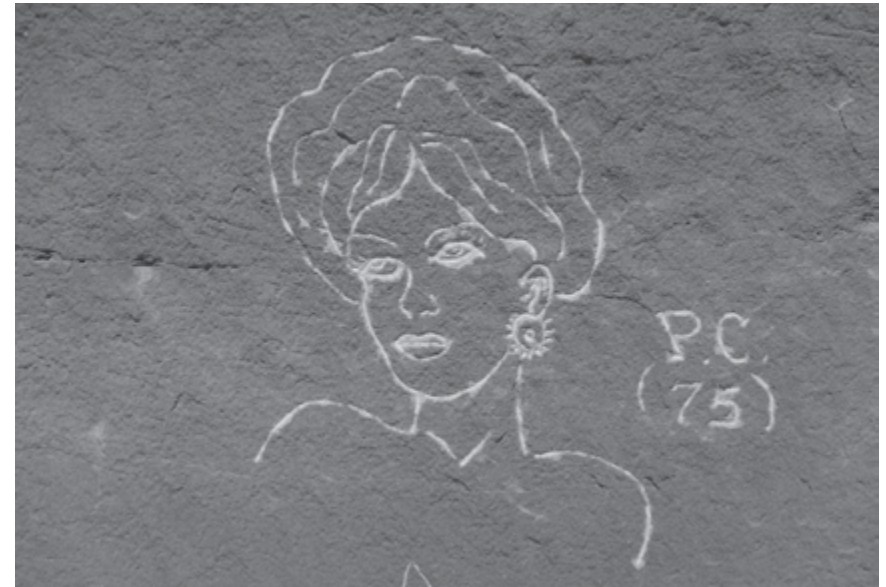
arboryph he elegantly carved the date horizontally, 7/30/38, and then his initials PM, and then his surname Chacon glides down the tree with a particularly long flourish to the last letter. Or is that the signature of his brother Press? Paco had five brothers.

He was born in 1916 at *La Mesa del Poleo* near Coyote, New Mexico, at the height of sheep numbers in the American West. His father Antonio also herded sheep. Pacomio Martinez Chacon, known as Paco, not only kept sheep safely bedded down at night, but over the decades his aspen art took on a unique style. Some scholars now consider him a “master folk artist.” On Colorado’s Western Slope, he probably had no equal, especially in the carving of curvaceous women in silhouettes with hair styles from the 1940s and 1950s.

From the Mesa of the Wild Mint and the northern New Mexico community of Coyote, Chacon came to live in Fruita, Colorado. His brother Press also carved aspens and sometimes the work of the two carvers can become confused, but Paco was the true artist. “I have never seen one of Paco’s [signatures] placed vertically on the trunk of the tree,” notes archaeologist Steven G. Baker, “or else Paco was having a really bad day.”³

Chacon carved trees, sandstone, and careful nudes. He knew hard work. His outdoor life with summers in the mountains and winters in the canyons kept him fit and healthy. He died in 2009 at the age of 93. His father Antonio used all of his sons to herd sheep and still earned only \$35 a month. Paco had limited schooling. Though he learned to read and write, his only teacher had just an 8th grade education.

Like hundreds of other sheep-herders, Chacon entered the U.S. Army. As a World War II veteran, Paco tried hiring on as a laborer for the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad, which regularly hauled sheep in the spring from Utah’s deserts to Cerro Summit and high mountain ranges in the San Juans. But Paco had no seniority with the railroad and lasted only 18 days. Married to Ophelia Martinez, with a family to support, he returned to herding and became expert at carving aspen arboryglyphs.



MARTY ELDER | *Woman's Bust* 1975

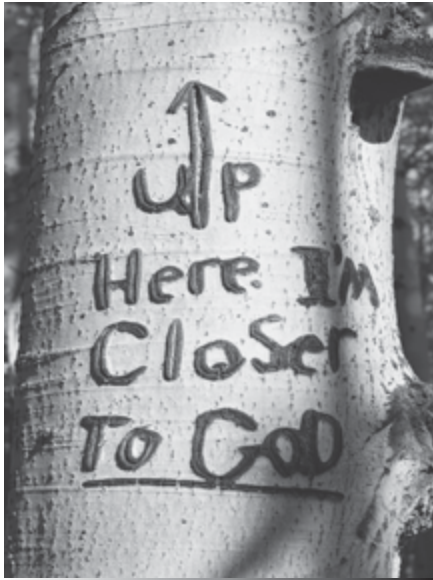
Paco Chacon was one of those rare sheepherders who carved on stone as well as aspen trees. Today, it is primarily his rock art that survives in place, as most of his arboryglyphs have gone from the forest and into the hands of collectors. This sandstone etching photographed near Rangely, even if it lacked his initials, is instantly recognizable as Chacon's.

Eventually, his herding took him north to the White River National Forest and the Seely Ranch near Meeker, Colorado, where he herded with Narcisco Martinez, his brother-in-law.

Like other herders, Chacon assisted with chain migration, bringing cousins, uncles, brothers, and friends from Coyote into Colorado to herd whenever a sheepman needed extra help.

His day began early, at 4 a.m., with the rise of the morning star, *La Estrella del Pastor*, a small fire in the stove to warm the tent, and coffee. For breakfast: a piece of cheese. By 5 a.m. he slowly moved his flock towards their daily feeding grounds, always wary of coyotes who like to pounce as the herd begins to line out on a trail. He kept *las borregas* out of the dark timber, where they can trip and fall in the spruce and pine and little lambs can impale themselves on sharp branches.

Between 9 and 10 a.m. Chacon had his flock near water and deep shade for mid-day while he returned to camp, chopped wood, brought his own water, ate a more substantial meal, prepared bread, and napped, with the dogs always on alert. By 3 p.m. Paco left camp to gently move the sheep to better feed and to graze them until twilight before tightly bunching the woolies as an effective deterrence to coyotes.



ANDREW GULLIFORD |
Spirituality in Nature

"Up Here I'm Closer to God" expresses spirituality in nature on Ripple Creek Pass.



ANDREW GULLIFORD | *I Love Wapiti*

"I Love Wapiti" is a heartfelt carving on Ripple Creek Pass.



ANDREW GULLIFORD | *Solemn Woman*

A solemn woman's portrait by a lonely herder can be found on the Pyramid Trail 1119, Routt National Forest, on the eastern edge of the White River Plateau.

Though his life as a herder rarely changed, his artistic skills progressed. Sheepmen and forest visitors came "to realize that the pictures he has been carving on aspen trees for so many years are much more than idle graffiti," noted interviewer and archaeologist Philip L. Born. "They are now coming to him and paying him to carve a picture on an aspen tree and using the picture as decoration for their home. The well carved picture on an aspen tree is now an art form in its own right."⁴

Paco carved nude women as angels with flowing capes. Sometimes his wife visited in camp, but for years he only saw her 15 days in the fall and a week in spring. His carvings reflect the longings of all lonely herders who would delight at finding a Chacon drawing as they moved sheep up a driveway high in an aspen forest. Other herders carved, but not with Paco's precision, his anatomical

correctness. Herders liked his art, and as his fame spread, locals from the Meeker area would seek out Paco's trees, cut them down, and save segments of aspens with his carvings on them. "They had a commercial value, and people would come and cut them and sell them in the newspaper," explained Mike Surber, a range management specialist for the Bureau of Land Management.

Chacon had signed his work, so the trees were easy to identify. Some of his carvings on sandstone, his etched art, have been shot at, vandalized. The aspen trees he carved would have fallen anyway. Aspens live only a century at most, but I think his carvings belonged in the forest to die a natural death.

Unlike rock art such as petroglyphs or pictograms carved or painted on stone, there are no cultural rules about protecting aspen art. I've found his name and dates etched on aspen, but I've never seen his carved portraits in the forest, though I've looked across the Flat Tops and the White River Plateau. He did his art for himself, for his fellow herders, but his work is now in people's living rooms, barns, or basements, the trees dismembered, the artist passed on.

At the White River Museum in Meeker, artifacts attest to sheepherders' lives. In the back room a painted sheepwagon has an elaborate carved wooden door with a handle made from horn and a shepherd's crook attached to the wagon. Old milk cans threaded on stiff wire resemble a large tambourine. Called "tin dogs," herders shook the wire ring to keep sheep moving down a trail. In the back, against the wall, in a glass case, is the hide and head of a snarling wolf, his pelt dusty, his teeth yellow. He was the last wolf killed in Rio Blanco County. He stares out with glass eyes. Beside him on the concrete floor is a segment of an aspen tree with a Pacomio Chacon carving from the Dick Moyer collection.



ANDREW GULLIFORD | *Aspen Girl*

This Paco Chacon carving is on a segmented part of an aspen tree at the White River Museum of the Rio Blanco County Historical Society in Meeker, Colorado. The carving is in the back of the museum, close to a historic sheepherder's wagon. Dick Moyer Collection

The white bark ages and fades. A pretty woman with full lips looks straight ahead, one eye larger than another as in a Picasso drawing. She wears a tight blouse that shows her feminine figure. Unlike other Chacon women, this girl, hair in bangs and down her back, does not seem to smile. She looks off to one side, a crack in the bark now creating a line across her forehead. Like the wolf pelt, she is an artifact out of place, out of time. Wolves are missing from the forest, and the work of herder and folk artist Pacomio Chacon is gone from the forest, too.



ANDREW GULLIFORD | *Flat Tops Aspen Grove in the Fall*



Note: This is part of a larger book-length research project on sheepherders and public land grazing in Colorado. If readers have suggestions or comments, please contact the author at Gulliford_a@fortlewis.edu

¹ To learn more about the Ute Trail across the Flat Tops, see Andrew Gulliford, *Sacred Objects and Sacred Places: Preserving Tribal Traditions* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000) 125-131.

² Site forms on BLM land courtesy of archaeologist Michael Selle, White River Office of the Bureau of Land Management, Meeker, Colorado.

³ Regan Tuttle, "Living History: Sheepherders etched their lives into local aspen trees, a history that will one day vanish," *The Watch*, September 24, 2015. Steve Baker letter to the editor about the article, October 14, 2015. For a detailed biography of Chacon see Steven G. Baker, *My Name is Pacomio! The Life and Works of Colorado's Shepherd and Master Artist of Nature's Canvases*, (Lake City, Colorado: Western Reflections Press, 2016).

⁴ Pacomio Chacon oral history interview by Philip L. Born, May 6, 1987, Grand Mesa Uncompahgre Gunnison National Forest (GMUG), Delta, Colorado.

Window

BY SAMANTHA WADE

Today I watched you out the window
 To make sure you got into your truck okay
 I know you've gotten stronger
 And don't always want me in the way
 Still I follow closely
 Prepared to catch you before you fall
 If you do I raise you back up fearless
 Because you have raised me strong
 Today as I watched you out the window
 Turns out you didn't need my help
 I smiled at your triumph
 A small one that gave me hope
 I know you want to do things on your own
 Just as I once did
 I wonder,
 How many times did you watch me out the window?
 I'm scared now
 As you knew that I would be
 My whole life I was kept safe and wild
 Because you protected me
 I know that you were ready
 Like the eagle who spreads his wings
 I wanted to fly with you
 Instead I held your hand as
 Your soul was set free
 I feel you watching through the window
 My heart will always be your home
 I will stand strong like you did
 Because I can feel you in my Bones.

A Whisper to Greatness

BY ROBERT TRUJILLO

I will never forget that midsummer day in 2006 when my friend Nintendo-Mouth finally took me with him to paint. I had been waiting for his invite for almost a year; he'd taught me all that I knew. From top-rock dancing to DJing, I loved all aspects of hip-hop; however, graffiti had me enchanted, and on this day, I would finally get to tell Denver my name.

We had to take a bus to our destination, which I hated, but it beat trudging about in the scorching sun. Nintendo-Mouth stood 6'5" and weighed maybe 150 pounds soaking wet, so I was surprised to see the burden of his backpack, stuffed to the brim with beer and spray paint and a huge 70s-style boom box. But he never complained or asked for help. Not after we got off the bus, or even when we trekked across the sun-baked, football-sized field that stood between us and our destination. In fact, the only time I handled the boom box was to pass it through a ripped-open section of the 8-foot fence located on the other side of the field. The fence screamed "Keep Out," but the lush forest on the other side was too enticing not to venture forward. Once inside, the drop in temperature was a spectacular reprieve from the unrelenting heat. The enormous maple trees, thick with leaves, transformed this wooded area into a majestic sanctuary from the sun. Off in the distance, past 10 yards of rock and decaying leaves, was something odd: a storm drainage ditch.

The man-made structure looked alien, surrounded by all the greenery of the secret forest. From ground level, imposing concrete walls dropped 12 feet to form a truncated v-shape. The walls were about 15 feet long; at the bottom of the "v" was an 8-foot wide sediment-covered floor. The whole structure led to a large gaping tunnel that ran off into oblivion. The entrance to the tunnel was about 10° cooler than even the shaded sanctuary and smelled vaguely of garbage. In the distance, I could hear running water, which led me to think that maybe it was a sewage runoff. While I was standing at the mouth of the tunnel, an ominous chill shocked my nerves. I would have to fight through it to look at the art surrounding us.

After we set up the paint and the boom box, I took a moment to read the writing on the wall — literally. To say I was unimpressed would be an understatement. The walls were coated in incoherent words made with an assault of awful and mismatching colors. *What an eyesore*, I thought to myself. As I gandered further at the walls, I found a gem: the name "Gimek." I was in awe of his immaculate line work and the red-hot color palette that jumped off the wall. The vibrant red and electric pink, with brown detail work, was so crisp and clear; it was captivating. I was envious, but more than that, I felt I had found an artist that I wanted to learn from. If I was going to reach that level of greatness, I would have to get started.

The paint cans felt incredible and seemed to give my hand a sense of purpose, as if my arm had been incomplete until it had clutched the Krylon. I was so excited. The smell was pungent, and I swear I could taste that "new house" smell. The bandanna I was wearing for protection did not do much, other than remind me that my breath was hot and smelled like beer and cigarettes. I did not like wearing it, but I figured it made me look pretty cool, so I pretended it helped. The paint felt like oil as it flowed and cascaded from one finger to the next, and before I knew it, I was making a mess. Clad in paint, I turned to my partner and asked him to throw me a beer. These were the first words spoken in hours. Up to this point, only the sweet jams of a Tribe Called Quest, Atmosphere, and the sounds of rattling spray paints filled the air. Suddenly my hand started to cramp and sent a shock up to my shoulder. It was enough to make me grimace in pain, but this was

my big chance to impress Nintendo, and I was not about to let anything shut me down.

As the sky was getting dark, the beer was all but gone, and I had just about exhausted the last of my spray cans. It was time to go. Before we left, I had to take a moment and marvel at my finished work. Standing almost 8 feet tall and 15 feet long — it was so much bigger than I had anticipated making it. "Voodoo." It was written in giant royal purple bubble cursive that frilled off at either end, and it was accented with sea-foam green, making it explode off the wall. Vibrant yellow outlined the entire piece to increase the contrast. It was magnificent, and words cannot describe how proud I was to express myself to Denver. I looked over to Nintendo and noticed that he had a little smirk on his face, as if to say "Ya done good, Bobby. Ya done good." At that moment, I realized graffiti would define me in the years to come.



NINTENDO-MOUTH | *Voodoo*

The author and graffiti-artist Robert Trujillo relaxes with a beer and contemplates "Voodoo" upon its completion.

About the Leica . . .

BY MICHAEL MELNECK

I got my first camera out of a box of Nabisco Shredded Wheat — I think I was seven or eight. I could take eight pictures on a roll of film smaller than half the size of my thumb and get them developed for less than a dollar at a drug store. The prints were 2"x 3" on glossy paper with a fat border — the image size was about 1-1/2" x 2-1/2"— and I know this because I still have a picture of Sparky, our dog at the time. The print of course hasn't aged well, but the little camera set a journey I'm still on.

Decades of what is now called "Gear Acquisition Syndrome" (it might be better called "I Can't Get No Satisfaction") found me shooting Olympus, Nikon, Canon, Pentax, Rolleiflex (all were film cameras) and probably a few I don't remember. I knew nothing about everything, and I'm sure there are a zillion life-changing photos out there in the ether because I didn't know how to edit or archive.

I entered the digital age, peering timidly around a corner, afraid I couldn't go back. Digital was magic. Digital was instant gratification. Digital made it ok to waste a lot of snaps because you knew there was a keeper in there somewhere. The camera was a Nikon Coolpix 4500 — a 4Mpx machine that fit in my pocket. Nirvana — I had arrived . . .

Until — until disaster struck as I made an 11"x 14" print. It was worse than awful! Blurry at best. It seemed to have been taken in a very smokey room.

No way to sharpen it. A long afternoon at a camera store convinced me that the key to huge razor sharp prints . . . was a new camera, with a bigger sensor and more megapixels. Over the next few years, I shot 10Mp, 16Mp, 18Mp and 24Mp cameras from the "usual suspects."

Then, in a somewhat epiphanous moment, it occurred to me that the only reason the pictures were getting better had NOTHING to do with the gear, but with my eye, which was becoming more discerning. Slowly I learned to take more interest in what went on before the shot. How's the light? How's the composition? What's the ISO, Aperture, Shutter Speed? Does the (proposed) photo tell a story?

Enter the Leica. As of today, for the right combination of body and lens, you can pay over \$20,000 for a Leica! Believe me, mine cost about 5% of that. Fiddling around with the guys at a great camera store in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, I came home with a Leica D-lux (typ) 109. Rangefinder style. 12.8Mp. Fixed lens (not interchangeable). It's so simple to operate that I can't even find some of the "features," which are tricks I'll probably not care about anyway. Image quality is stunning — and 99% of my caring is about image quality.

In a group a few days ago, one of the not-so-cognoscenti said, "OOO, it's just a compact," and I was proud to say, "Yes, and a Lamborghini is just a car." Score: Leica 1, Unenlightened 0.



MICHAEL MELNECK | Rifle Falls 2016



KATHY SIMPSON | *Guarded by Angel Wings*

Carnival Ridge

BY DAVID MORRIS

I've got the entire
afternoon
to weary my nephew
with dredged-up ancient memories
on this dry hot blustery day —

we plan
to sniff around the whole
of a long
sandy
sagebrushed
rock-littered
steep-sided
ridge.

Once started
I can't stop
spilling stories
seasoned

with gratuitous violence
bad choices
abject human wreckage —

pieces and bits
from my once-upon-a-time
life as a carny.

At day's end
we christen the ridge:

it deserves a name
and gets one.

Shock

BY DAVID MORRIS

I'm
headed north
out of Meeker
on 13
when

two golden eagles

lift off a dead doe
just below the lip of the highway
and into
a dusk darkened sky

but too late
too slow
too low.

One rises just enough
and swerves
to my right
the other
veers my direction
hammers into the top left corner
of my windshield
and barrel rolls away

while I clutch the wheel
and grieve

because I'll get
no instant replay
no second chance
no reprieve:

I can't make
the death of an eagle
unhappen.



SHAYNA ALLEN | *Abstract Words*



DONNA THEIMER | *Mountain King*

Ravens

By DAVID MORRIS

The quiet of a warm fall afternoon
is pierced
then shattered
by three
strident
deep-throat shrieks —

the complaints of an anguished raven
high in the thinning foliage
of a nearby cottonwood.

Downriver a second raven
echoes his call

followed by another
and finally a fourth.

Now
the airwaves ring
with atonal
urgent croaks
and I get a move on

before I give in to temptation

and chime in.



JANELE HUSBAND | *Bull Moose*



LEROY JAGODINSKI | *Mt. Sopris Rams*



JOHN WILLEY | *Yellowstone Grizzly*



JOHN WILLEY | *Yellowstone Wolf*

Comment Mourir

BY CHRIS SOWERS

Gracile spider moves on silver thread,
in gossamer-spun web's hoary dread.
Its mincing menace smooth and low,
with fluttering moth fanged, in tow.
Nimble nodding with many eyes,
Spider's lancet legs pierce prey, who dies!

October Spell

BY CHRIS SOWERS

Thistle, goldenrod, aster & rose
under bridge a creek does flow . . .
Cottonwood, maple & aspen leaves fly
where bindweed, knotweed & orach lie . . .
From fountains on mountains, pale
watery new moon long last the truth do tell!
Flow on, look deep, hear muted sweet song
wherein sibilant brook's shadow in nimble nature I long!



RENE HARDEN | *Painted Forest by Jack Frost*

Grandma

BY JOSEY KING

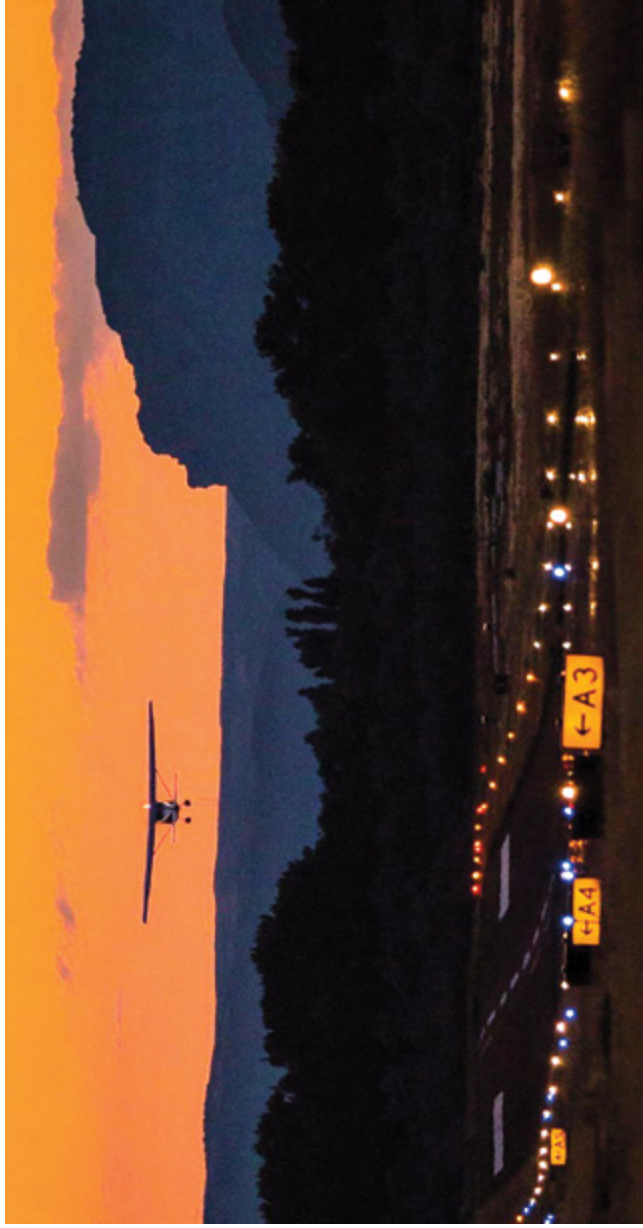
On your birthday,
I hope that there is stained glass.
I hope there are garage sales.
I hope the fish bite.
I hope McDonald's doesn't mess up the daily breakfast order.
I hope that damn computer will work today.
I hope your cross-country skis won't give you a blister.
I hope the bubblegum you put in your garden keeps the moles out.
I hope the cookies don't burn in your ancient oven while you
mow the ditch, paint the floor, and fix the hole in the roof.
I hope the friend that you see at the store talks to you
about softball in '65.
I hope today is perfect,
But I wish you were with me,
On your birthday.



CARTER CHADWICK | *Campus Light*



JENNY MEYER | *The 60s and Before*



MATTHEW HARWOOD | *Positive Rate Gear Up!*



PAUL BURGELL | *Eternal Bloom*



KATHY SIMPSON | *Pool Creek Sheep Wagon*



CAROL WILSON | *What an Adventure!*



KATHY SIMPSON | *Hummer*

High Noon for a Western Oil Town

By KEN BAILEY

Among the many cowboy movies that graced American theaters generations ago, *High Noon* is a classic that stands out.

In *High Noon*, Gary Cooper's character Will Kane returns to the town where he was recently the marshal. He soon learns that one of the bad guys whom he had locked up years earlier has just gotten out of prison, and with his old gang is returning to town as well — seeking revenge. The townspeople are very nervous about this, but there is an additional consideration: Once upon a time, the town had been a wild-and-woolly lawless place, but the days of gunslingers and outlaws are fading away. The town has settled down and become respectable. The return of a wild outlaw is a threat to the progress that's been made, and the townsfolk do not relish having to deal with this. They press the ex-marshal to again take up his badge. However, as he goes from person to person and business to business trying to forge a partnership to meet the threat, Kane finds himself fighting a lonely battle. No one wants to get involved.

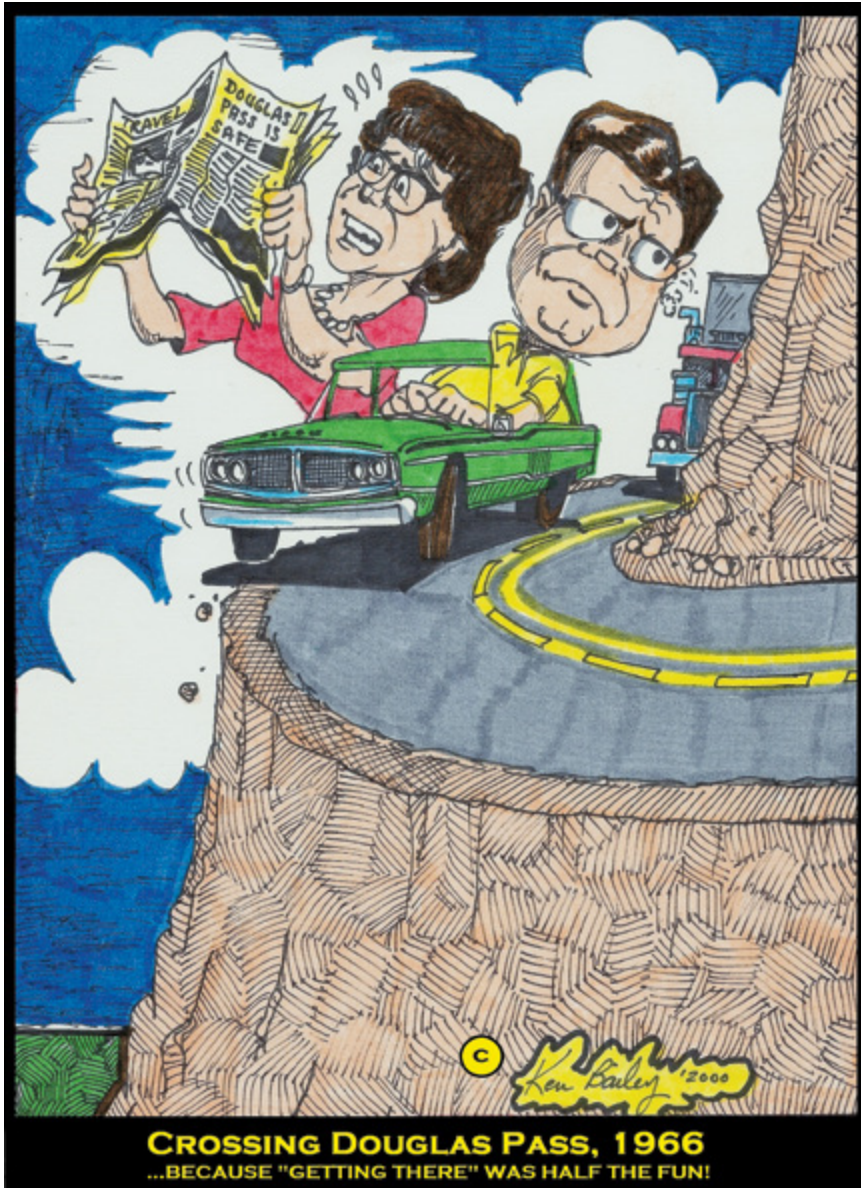
One of the more memorable components of the movie is a repeated scene: a simple view of empty railroad tracks leading out of town. Not a thing moves, but somewhere out there a train is steaming toward the town, loaded with angry bad guys. As the townspeople argue and struggle and grapple with their own fears aroused by the marshal's rescue plans, the train is coming nonetheless. It is not yet in sight, and the temptation is to refuse to acknowledge the reality of the problem — perhaps it will just go away without a fight.

But then, there are those train tracks again. High noon is coming.

Rangely, Colorado, is a western town that is facing its own version of *High Noon*. Little more than a gas station and trading post before World War II, the town boomed in the 1940s as new sources for domestic crude were tapped to fuel the war effort. By the time the boom was over, almost 500 deep oil wells pumped up and down, and Rangely was a town approaching a state of normalcy, sitting on the edge of the largest oil field in the Rocky Mountains.

The oil just flowed and flowed and flowed. But the field was aging. Gradual change came in stages.

The original wells in “the Patch” had been drilled in nice, straight conservation-minded “forty-acre-spacing” rows, but by the late 1950s natural pressure was dropping. It was feared that continued uninhibited production would lead to the field's early demise. A solution was to “unitize” the operations, putting the entire field under the management of one company. This not only reduced duplication of services, but enabled field-wide management of oil recovery, a major



KEN BAILEY | *Douglas Pass*



KEN BAILEY | *Waterflood*

The author's brother and a cat check out a waterflood injection well just over the hill from St. Timothy's Church in Rangely. As with most wells such as this one, it had been a producer until the late 1950's when it was converted to force water back down into the underground oil sands to assist production on other wells. Cement bases once held up a derrick (tower) over the well, and later a walking-beam pumping unit.

original models. More fluid in the pool below meant that more had to be lifted. Soon, another new pump type appeared — an underground, electric pump called a submersible. Able to lift even more fluid than the bird-like “air balances” they replaced, the underground pumps were installed in such large numbers that they had largely cleared away the bobbing surface pumps field-wide in about twenty years.

More wells were being drilled. In 1963, the regular checkerboard “40-acre-spacing” of the original wells changed when drilling commenced on “infill wells,” a fifth new well between four of the old ones.

And further methods were introduced to aid recovery of the oil still in the ground. A pilot program of alternating water and gas injection gave way eventually to injection of huge amounts of carbon dioxide gas, which “unlocked” oil molecules from the sandy rock in which it was encased and helped get it to the hungry wells.

example of which was water flooding. Certain producing oil wells were shut down in patterns and converted to inject water back into the ground — to buoy up oil in the sands and prod it toward other still-producing wells. By 2000, almost half the total well population had been “injected.”

Further changes followed.

Huge new pumps called “air balances” began appearing in large numbers — replacing the smaller



KEN BAILEY | *Airbalance*
1972

Dramatic shot of a big Lufkin “air-balance” pump on a well in the western Rangely field. The main component of such a pump is a horizontal “walking” beam, named for the up-and-down motion it makes as it pulls a string of rod out of the well-hole.

As the 20th century drew to a close, however, it was evident that oil field production rates were in a gradual but persistent decline. Producing 80,000 barrels-per-day in the 1970s, the field's daily output 40 years later was hovering at about 22,000 b.p.d.

The day is coming when Rangely will have to face life without energy extraction.

That day — the day the oil dries up and takes the remaining oil field jobs with it — will be Rangely's *High Noon*. The approaching train of “Rangely after Oil” is chugging toward us from the future, and it will eventually pull into town.

What will happen then? Will Rangely cease to exist? Will it go back to being just a little trading post town for ranchers — a couple of hundred people holding to what was left in the middle of nowhere?

Will the art, the culture, the College, the merchants, and everything else that was wrested out of the hard desert sand during the boom-years simply evaporate and be lost? Or will Rangely survive, having evolved into something else, something outliving the end of the oil, even thriving as the energy-recovery days fade out and the new realities fade in?

Is Rangely even worth saving?

There are those who will answer “No” — emphatically. But many of us who have Rangely in our history and in our blood say “Yes!” Rangely is more than just worth keeping alive. Rangely is our home — home to four generations now since the Raven A-1 started flowing oil. It has kids that today are flung all over the nation, yet who are held together by a common cord — a shared identity of growing up in this place that has shaped them, somehow never letting them



KEN BAILEY | *School Derrick 1972*

A steel oil derrick rises over a waterflood conversion oil well at the edge of the Rangely Grade School playground; this well had been a pumping oil producer until the late 1950's. "Standard derricks" — so popular in movies — were towers over oil wells left there for servicing purposes, to provide a place to pull and stack pipe lengths out of the well hole when something broke down. They were similar to taller towers used to drill the wells in the first place. Both versions were made obsolete by the coming of portable, collapsible towers mounted on trucks, but several of the old derricks remained in the Rangely area for about twenty years after they were removed in the larger field. No derricks remain in Rangely today.

modern 1960s-era middle school came into view, right beside the city limits. By the end of the night, we were sleeping in the former oil camp house that would be our new home, ringed by a modest yard of real green grass and spreading cottonwood trees.

Rangely people are friendly — in a town this size, cut off from the rest of the world (and more-so in those pre-cable TV and pre-Internet days), it was said that if you sneezed, someone at the far end of the town would holler, "Bless You!" We were introduced to venison that very evening as our new neighbors — avid hunters — invited us for dinner. Within a day or two my brother and I had

go — even, in some cases, after fifty or more years of physical relocation.

I am one of those people. I moved to Rangely in 1966 as a kid just finishing grade school. I lived there until 1972, leaving — out of necessity — just before the start of my senior year in high school. It is now forty-five years later. But, in a very real way, I have never really left.

I remember pulling into Rangely for the first time just before Labor Day. Before that, home had been on the East Coast, a bedroom community outside Philadelphia. Now, the scenery's gradual change over three days of travel had become bronze desert and brown scrub, punctuated by a sea of bobbing oil pumps.

We passed the Texas Oil Camp — a little gaggle of trees and houses in the middle of the Basin, looking like an Arbor Day version of the proverbial "wagons in a circle" in the Western movies. "I hope that isn't Rangely," my mother quipped, somewhat fearfully.

It wasn't. A few minutes later, the road dipped into the White River Valley at the east end of the oil basin, and Rangely appeared.

Green trees lined the path of the river through the town. Evenly spaced silver oil derricks rose above them. A

started school. Everybody knew everybody, and we could have easily fit the entire Rangely Public School enrollment onto the town football field, which sat between the high school and the grade school, and was flanked by an oil derrick.

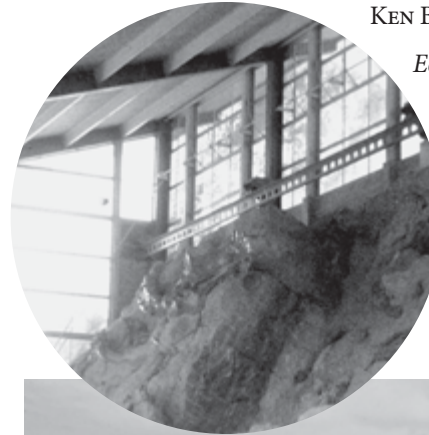
We were family — an entire town of it. It was not all sunshine and roses. But we were all it in together. There was no place else to go!

Isolated from the rest of the world, without social media to tie us to the outside, one might at first be reminded of the words from the old theme song to *Gilligan's Island*: "No Phones! No Lights! No Motorcars — Not a Single Luxury!" On the surface, like kids pretty much everywhere, Rangely students could bemoan the lack of things to do.

But, somehow, we kept ourselves busy. And, when one stops to think about it, there was a lot to do.

Even as a kid, I was fascinated by the oil field and its pumpers, derricks, and operations. The school system had a husband-and-wife teaching team, the Mitchems, who were first-rate photographers, one of whom advised a school

KEN BAILEY | *Dino Quarry 1971*



Eons ago, near Jensen, Utah — not far from Rangely — a strata of rock had burst to the surface, bearing an incredible number of dinosaur remains. After a number of entire skeletons had been removed early in the last century, the land was declared a National Monument and a building constructed right over the bone-bearing rock so tourists could watch scientists painstakingly uncover the remaining bones.



“Foto Klub.” When I caught the “photo bug” myself, the oil field provided a vast operation to document with photos, maps, charts, and questions to workers and their children.

There were other things, also. Nearby was Plug Hat, a mesa jutting up out of the Utah plain that had a frontier picnic area on its summit — and a vast view of the geological wonders to the west from its rims.

Further down the road were Jensen, Utah, and the Dinosaur Quarry — a glass building covering one of the greatest “digs” of dinosaur bones in the West. From a viewing platform, we could watch scientists and technicians removing huge chunks of rock with jack-hammers at one end — and laboring over exposed bones with toothbrushes at the other end. And Vernal, further down the road apiece — had a Natural History Museum, shops selling famous Utah honey, and a Ute Indian Trading Post.

Real shopping came once a month, when we would pile in the car and drive over the dreaded Douglas Pass to distant Grand Junction — the nearest city. (My mother would read a newspaper so she wouldn't be tempted to look out the windows as we traversed the Pass — treetops passing by the edge of the road and no guard rails in many places.) At the summit was the sudden panorama of the distant Grand Valley, and then the road dropped down the southern slope of the Pass — the bottom of which would be reached only after fifteen further minutes of switchbacks and hairpin turns. Once at the bottom, one could look back toward the top of Douglas and see a black sedan that had missed that first hairpin curve and slid down the mountainside and come to rest upright on its wheels. Where it had stopped, it remained for years, a silent warning to motorists to keep the speed down and watch the curves.



KEN BAILEY | *Lion's Head*

In the middle of an open area on the far side of Coal Oil Ridge north of Rangely sat “Lion's Head,” a rock outcropping that resembled the profile bust of a lion. This 1969 photo shows the complete head; in the years following, the jaw would fall off. Wind and blowing sand carved the head from the soft rock over time.



KEN BAILEY |
Flat Tire on Douglas

In 1969, not all of the Douglas Pass road was yet paved. Automobile tires were not what they are today, and flats were frequent. In this photograph, the author's father changes a tire as passengers look on — a rocky start to a family vacation.

Part of Douglas Pass wasn't even paved when we moved to Rangely. Flat tires and auto breakdowns were the norm. But, should one occur, it was just be a matter of time before another Rangely-bound motorist would happen along, and stop — offering to take you the rest of the way to town, or to send a tow-truck or a spare tire back in response.

The school system provided further opportunities for recreation and travel. Although I was not wrestling material, I served as team manager, which took me all over the western part of the state (and much of eastern Utah), introducing me both to the excitement of wrestling tournaments and meets, and also to home-cooked burgers at restaurants before a McDonald's came to town. Further travel involved a class trip to the famous hot springs pools at Glenwood Springs — from which I watched the famous California Zephyr passenger train slide by on the other side of the Colorado River.

Camping and sight-seeing trips came with both Scouting and Foto Klub, with destinations such as Rifle Falls and Peter Potomus Rock, the latter named for a large outcropping that resembled a TV cartoon character of the time. A similar unusual formation on the other side of Rangely was Lion's Head — yes, shaped like a lion's head on a pedestal of weathered sandstone.

We camped in Flaming Gorge near the famous man-made lake, where — in a restroom at 2:00 a.m. — I saw my first Jerusalem cricket, more commonly called a child-of-the-earth, a bug so hideous that most who have seen one shudder at the memory. It looks like a big termite with a human skull; the one I saw in the restroom was trying to climb out of a wash basin, and I was so terrified that I spent the rest of the night in the school bus we had come in. That bus, by the way, named “Hamster” — due to the supposed motive power under the hood — was of 1940s vintage and used for such trips when better buses were not available. Its horn stuck regularly. On one trip our Scout leader tooted at a kid on

the outskirts of Vernal, and Hamster wailed the entire length of downtown before finally shutting off. Shopkeepers came out of their stores to watch us as the Scout leader frantically pounded on the horn button trying to get it to stop.

While the Rangely downtown might have been meager by some standards, there was Strain's Drug Store, which had everything under the sun, it seemed, in addition to drugs: model kits, toys, candy, magazines, household items, and film developing (mail service to a lab in distant Salt Lake City, Utah). On the other end of town, Nichol's Store (the old pre-oil original) was still very much in operation. We also had a Western Auto, an "Exchange," three gas stations, and an old-time movie theater where feature-length films could be watched for a dollar or two, with cartoons and the obligatory ten-cent candy bar and/or popcorn available at the concessions stand!

Simple pleasures?

You bet. But we kids knew nothing else. There was the vast desert of public land to explore — lizards and "horny toads" to catch and bring home, forts to build, open spaces to launch model rockets or to explore withered old "shallow field" oil pumps, and magnificent sunsets — a Western staple.

Rangely today has changed. It is home to a new generation who never knew "my" Rangely.

Is Rangely today worth saving? Yes.



LILLIAN BAILEY | *Rangely Sheep*

Shepherders drive sheep down River Road in Rangely in 1969 behind the author's house. This event happened yearly in the old days as sheep went from their winter to their summer pastures and back again.

There are a couple of sites on the Internet that portray today's Rangely as an awful place to live, little better than Hell itself. However, I imagine every place has a few people, especially younger ones, who view it that way. When I left Rangely, the city I moved to was twenty-five times larger, but I found kids in my new school saying the same thing as some Rangely kids had said: "I can hardly wait to grow up and get out of this crummy little town!"

Yet it is interesting that, all these years later, my Wisconsin town is full of people who grew up here and never went very far away. Rangely is the same. A good percentage of my former classmates are still, almost fifty years later, living within a day's drive of Rangely, and some are still there in R-Town itself.

And yet, high noon is still coming. Be it in twenty years or more, the day will come when oil is no longer a player in Rangely's fortunes. The town needs to reinvent itself or die, and it needs to start doing it now, while there is still time.

There are those who are trying to morph Rangely into a tourist-friendly place, a place people would like to visit. And I am amazed at the list of things one can find in Rangely today that were not there in my day — among them a dam and lake, a history museum, an Arts association, a recreation center with an Olympic-sized pool, and even a re-purposed "Sonic" water tank that has received widespread publicity as a unique sound recording and music education center! There is a big party in September ("Septemberfest") and a Crack Crab event in January. There is a rock crawling park for off-road 4-wheeling. And the "Indian" petroglyphs and pictographs out Dragon Road have been joined by so many new discoveries that one could spend an entire day just checking them out.

The newest addition is the Rangely Car Museum — my Dad would have a field day with that one, were he still alive, given his lifelong passion for antique/classic cars.

As with all towns in the throes of change, some push back at all this "new" stuff. Reasons vary: the bad economy, poverty, dislike of losing what is old, or just plain resentment that times are moving on. Like the townspeople in *High Noon*, their reasons for turning away from what is coming are human and understandable. Yet, it doesn't stop the approaching train. High noon will eventually come.

The questions is — when the train finally does comes in — will it be loaded with the consequences of not being prepared in advance? Or, rather, will it be loaded with tourists and new opportunity because people were brave enough and stubborn enough and "Rangely enough" to muscle through the times of discouragement, and dare to dream and think and plan ahead?

[ROLL THEME SONG, CUT TO END CREDITS.]



The Enigma of Fuzz

BY DEBORAH MILES FREITAG



This piece contains adult situations and language.



KEN BAILEY | *Generations*

A self-portrait by the author depicting his adult-self returning to join his childhood-self to again take photographs in the Rangely Field.

I learned to swallow a pill whole when I was three. There was no nonsense about chewing it or spitting it out. One time when I had a fever, my dad simply gave me a drink of water, put an aspirin in my mouth, gave me another drink of water, and shouted, “Swallow the goddamn aspirin!” I did. He grabbed me by the armpits and hoisted me on his lap, slapped my head against his chest, and patted the side of my head. “Stop blubbering. You’re going to make it worse. Now just settle down, goddamnit.” I did. I rested my head against his breast pocket, crushing his Camels, and tolerated him jarring my brain with his rough hand. He poured two shot glasses full of bourbon, and he and Mom downed them and chased them with water. I counted; this was their third, and I squirmed a little in Dad’s lap. “Sit still, goddamnit,” and he gave me a hard pat on the ear. I sat still while Mom cleared the table, leaving the glasses and the bottle next to Dad, and started the dishes. I listened as Dad told Mom the oilfield scuttlebutt, which was about some goddamn engineer about whom he said, “If brains was gas, that S.O.B. couldn’t fart big enough to push a piss ant’s go-cart around the inside of a Cheerio.” I giggled a bubbly, phlegmy laugh, and Dad patted my head a little faster. “Hush now. Hush now.” I felt the button on his shirt pocket dig into my cheek and thought about little piss ants with their carts whirling around the inside of Cheerios when smart people farted on them. It took my mind off my sore throat.

After the kitchen was clean, Dad poured another shot. Four, I counted to myself. He stood up with me in the crook of his arm and my head on his shoulder and carried me to the front room. Since it was snowing hard and the TV wouldn’t work, Mom opened the doors to the mahogany phonograph and put on a Louis Armstrong record. I bounced on my dad’s lap as he kept time to the music with his foot. The clear and powerful trumpet filled the room and seemed to cut through the cigarette smoke, purifying the air.

Dad would talk about Louis Armstrong as if he were an old friend of the family. We heard stories about how Louis had to stand eight feet or more behind his band because the sound of his trumpet was so powerful, and how he said his birthday was on the Fourth of July because he really didn’t know when he had been born. Dad used to quote Louis all the time, saying things like, “Ya dig me?” and “Solid, Jack!” I used to wonder why he never came to visit. If he came, Mom would bake bread and we could all tell him how great he made us feel. He was singing “I Got It Bad and That Ain’t Good.” I thought he was singing about my sore throat. Mom and Dad’s shots of whiskey entered the realm of high math and I lost count.

When both sides of the record were finished, Dad said, as he always said after listening to Louis, “That ole Louis is the best goddamn nigger that ever lived.” I got down off Dad’s lap and stood in the middle of the front room floor. I picked up the dog’s bone and pretended it was a microphone. I was delirious with fever and trumpet. I brought my voice up from my toes and through the phlegm, scratched it against my raw throat and belted out, “Oh Lord, how I wanna be in that number, when the Saints go marching in. OH WHEN THE SAINTS. OH WHEN THE SAINTS.” Louis Armstrong’s gravelly bass coming out of a 32 pound sickling was too much. Dad put his cigarette in the ashtray and slapped his knees with both hands. He threw his head back and laughed until he was coughing and crying. “Well, I’ll be goddamned,” he said. I decided to sing a chorus of “If I Had the Wings of an Angel.” “Oh stop!” my mom cried. “I’m going to pee my pants.” I took a deep bow and put the dog bone back up to my mouth. I was going to end with “What Did I Do To Be So Black and Blue” when the cough hit me. I was wheezing and gasping. Dad scooped me up. “Time for bed, Little Louis.”

Once tucked in bed beside Joan, Mom gave me a teaspoon of cough stopping dope and planted a wet whiskey kiss on my forehead. We said our prayers and I fell asleep before I could finish the sign of the cross. I awoke an hour later with the words, “If I should die before I wake . . .” on my lips. I sat up and threw my head back and tried to suck some air into my lungs. Joan sat up too. “What’s wrong with you?” she demanded and shook me hard. “I pray the Lord my soul to take,” I said. She jumped out of bed and ran to Mom and Dad’s room. “Debby’s sick! Debby’s sick!” she shouted.

Mom strode into the room, yanking the string off the light fixture as she came — a barefoot authority on childhood illness — and put her cool hand on my forehead. Dad staggered in after her in his boxers and tee shirt. “What’s the matter, Snot Nose?” he asked.

“If I had the wings of an angel,” I whispered.

“Jesus,” Dad whispered.

“Call the hospital,” Mom snapped. Dad ran out to the kitchen. Joan climbed back under the blankets.

“Don’t wiggle the bed,” Mom warned her. Joan froze, covers suspended in midair, but it was too late. I threw up pink cough syrup.

“Get a wash rag!” said Sober Mom.

My mother cleaned my face and hands with a wet wash rag so cold that it hurt my bones. As she bundled me in blankets, I heard Dad start the car. The back door slammed as he came back in. “It’s snowing like a dirty bitch,” he announced. “Get your shoes on, Helen.” He lifted the bundle that I was choking inside of and covered my face with an itchy navy blanket. I sat in the middle of the front seat between Mom and Dad, and Joan, still in pajamas, rode in the back seat.

That’s the only thing I remember about that trip to the hospital. I learned later that I had a collapsed lung. I stayed there for two weeks, with Dr. Robert L. Smith by my side the first twenty-four hours, and Mom and Dad taking turns for the whole two weeks. I was never alone. I spent Christmas in the hospital, and that was the year I learned that being sick was the safe thing. People sobered up right away when I turned blue around the lips. No one got in a fistfight. And if I got sick enough and had to be in the hospital, there was that wonderful button that I could push, and a friendly and sober nurse would come running to see what I wanted.

My dad was an oil field man from central Texas who everyone knew as Fuzzy Miles. He was short and fine boned and a natural athlete. Sometimes when he had enough to drink, he would show us how he could do one-armed push-ups, or he would do push-ups and clap three times before he put his hands down again. He had wide shoulders and a big, muscular chest. He had the arms of a hard worker: sinewy, and tanned almost black, especially the left arm that hung out the window of his company pickup while driving the oil roads. His hands were small but square, strong, and clean, with the nails clipped short.

His nose was skewed sideways across his face, but otherwise he was a handsome man with a determined jaw, and fierce, laughing blue eyes. Underneath the C-shaped nose was a black Clark Gable style mustache trimmed to perfection and accentuated with gray whiskers. He grew that mustache when he was seventeen years old, hence the name Fuzzy. The name stayed with him all his life, and so did the mustache.

He was a plain speaker; he minced no words. He used to say, “I believe in calling a spade a fucking shovel.” And it was his voice that was his most remarkable feature. In a normal conversation he had a smoky and even gravelly voice — a white version of Louis Armstrong’s voice. When he told jokes, he always lowered his voice to almost a mumble and punctuated the story with chuckles, nods, and giggles. I always had to listen very hard to hear the whole joke. It was when he was angry that his voice was the most impressive. His voice came booming and roaring out of his wide chest. It was more than a sound; it was a fireball of volume that destroyed everything in its path. It made me move involuntarily, and I dreaded hearing it.

Dad had a smile that no woman, not even my mother, could resist. He used to sidle up to the bridge ladies, give them the smile and a wink, and the old biddies would start blushing. He would pull a polished stone about the size of a pullet egg out of his pocket and ask a bridge lady, “You know what this is?” She would look at the rock blankly and say, “Why Fuzzy, it looks like a rock.” “Nope,” he would reply. “It’s a sex stone. Do you know what a sex stone is?” This question always produced a startled look and a menopausal flush from the lady. “A sex stone! What’s a sex stone?” He would lean in close to the lady’s ear and whisper,

“Just another fucking rock.” “Oh Fuzzy! You devil!” He would giggle; they would giggle, and my mother would pretend as though she hadn’t heard a thing.

Between his fist fighting and inappropriate jokes, Dad managed to embarrass his family throughout his life. Once Joan came home from school with her forehead bleeding. “Jesus. What happened to you?” Mom asked. Dad was sitting at the table drinking a beer, as it was his day off. “Maggie threw a rock at me,” Joan whined.

Dad grabbed her by the arm, spun her around, and slapped her hard on the bottom. Then he spun her around again and shouted in her astounded and bloody face, “Get your ass out there and defend yourself.” Joan ran out of the house before Mom could even put a Band-Aid on her head. Later, Joan came back in the house, sat on the couch, and stared at the TV. She wasn’t going to talk; I could tell.

After supper, she and I were playing in the yard, Mom was weeding a flower bed next to the house, and Dad was making potato hills in our garden plot with the six foot deer fence. Maggie’s father, Rusty Hancock, opened his back door and from his back step he yelled at my father, “You mother fucking son of a bitch!”

I knew that “son of a bitch” was a name that Dad would never tolerate. I had seen him hit my mother for it. I stood paralyzed, waiting for the murder I knew would take place. Dad, with shovel in hand, ran toward the deer fence. I thought he would blast through it and kill Rusty with the shovel. Instead, he jammed the shovel in the ground and used it to vault over the fence. He hit the ground rolling, jumped up, cleared the two fences between our yard and the Hancock’s, and knocked Rusty off the step. By then all the neighbors were out in the yards watching. My mother gathered Joan and I up and shooed us in the house, saying, “Jesus, Joseph, and Mary. Jesus, Joseph, and Mary.”

Dad came in the house revved up, ready to go another round; Joan and I ran to our room and climbed on the bed, listening. Dad had a bloody nose, and Mom was insisting that they go to the hospital. We all piled in the car. Joan and I were in the backseat quiet as dead men. Mom drove while Dad held a hanky to his face and muttered curses. Mom was desperately trying to think up lies to tell the doctor about what had happened. She had experience inventing lies about broken faces. We walked in the emergency room and Dad announced to the astonished Dr. Robert L. Smith, “I kicked that big S.O.B.’s ass.” Dr. Smith stitched and set Dad’s nose, and from then on it was just a little more skewed. We were never allowed to speak to the Hancock’s again, and my mother didn’t leave the house for a week for fear that a neighbor would ask her a question about the event.

Mom and Dad never drank until after 5:00 p.m., when Dad got off work. They were responsible drunks. Dad never missed a day of work, and Mom kept us well fed and the house very, very clean. Mom was always waiting at the door for Dad to get home, and the first thing he did was pour them both a shot of

bourbon. Joan and I became very well behaved after five o’clock. There was no telling what might cause an explosion. One warm summer evening we had been out riding bikes. We took every opportunity to stay out of the house after five. It was getting dusk and Joan had the wonderful idea to pitch the tent and spend the night outside. I was thrilled. We could sit up all night, play cards by flashlight, and maybe even gorge ourselves on stolen tomatoes from the neighbor’s garden.

We entered into the house together. Mom and Dad were at the kitchen table discussing something in strident voices. Any other time we would have been more careful, but we really wanted to sleep in the tent. We were drunk with the notion. Joan walked right up to the table and posed the question, “Can Deb and I sleep outside in the tent?” “Of course.” “No, you certainly may not!” The words crashed in mid-air. We weren’t even sure who said “yes” and who said “no.” When Dad slammed his fist on the table and yelled, “Goddamnit Helen!” we ran to our room and climbed on the bed, sitting very close. We listened. There was yelling and cursing and then the words — “Fuzzy, you son of a bitch!” Chairs screeched. Bodies thumped. Glasses broke. Joan crawled across the bed to the window, threw it open and unlatched the screen. She pulled me to the window and began pushing me out of it. “Run! Run tell the neighbors!”

I fell out the window and scrambled to the Morgan’s house and ran in the door without knocking. Lester was practicing the piano and Mrs. Morgan was knitting. “Help!” I screamed. “Dad’s going to kill my mom!” Mr. Morgan ran up from the basement, grabbed a baseball bat, and headed to our house. I ran after him. Mrs. Morgan ran after me. Lester ran after Mrs. Morgan. All the neighbors were coming out of their houses and running to our house. It’s a funny thing how the sound of domestic violence carries.

The minute Mr. Morgan opened the front door, my Dad lowered his fist and said, “Fuck you all.” He went out the back door and we didn’t see him again that night. The neighbors helped Mom up and took care of her black eye. After everything had calmed down and the neighbors had left, she turned to me and said, “Don’t you ever, ever leave this house again without my permission. And if you ever tell anyone again what happens in this house, I will slap you up to a point and then knock the point off. Now go to bed!” We went to bed wondering where our daddy was.

Dad came home after work the next day and was very humble and loving. He and Mom made a “pact” they told us, to never drink again. In a couple of days it was decided that one little nip wouldn’t hurt, and then it was decided that they would drink a little bit but never like they had before, and then things were back to the normal abnormal. Every night Mom was waiting at the back door, and every night they were drunk by eight o’clock. There would be periodic flare ups, but Joan and I were very careful. We thought that if we were very good, that — that there would be no more trouble. People were always commenting to our parents about what wonderfully behaved children we were; shame and terror make for good children.

When I was in third grade a little stray dog jumped out of the trash, right in Dad's face. "Well, goddamn," he said. "The poor little bugger is starving to death. Helen, give her a bowl of milk." Then he turned to Joan and me and said, "If you think we are going to keep this dog, you've got another thing coming." The dog hung around for a few days, and Joan and I furiously worked on Mom to let us keep the dog.

Finally she relented, but Dad was the problem. One afternoon Dad came home from work, and instead of waiting at the back door, Mom was sitting at the kitchen table with the dog at her feet. "What's that goddamn dog doing in the house?" he shouted. Mom reached down and rubbed the little dog's head. "Fuzzy, can't we keep her?"

"What the hell are you talking about? You know Debby's allergic."

"I promise I won't get sick, Dad. I promise."

"NO!" he shouted.

I began to cry. Joan began to cry. Mom began to cry.

"Oh all right we'll keep her, but she stays outside and the first time I have to take that kid to the hospital, I'm going to shoot the goddamn dog." Within a week Cleo, who we found out was a border collie-Pomeranian mix, was allowed in the kitchen only. Within two weeks she was sitting beside us on the couch. Within three weeks she gave birth to five pups. The evening she had the puppies, Dad would check on her every ten minutes and give us a report. "By God, I think there's another one coming."

Each new puppy required a celebration drink or two. When a puppy would come, Dad would pick up the little thing and look at its underside and pronounce it a boy or a girl. So far we had three boys and one girl. "How can you tell if it's a boy or a girl?" Joan asked. Dad chuckled and then he hemmed and hawed. "Well, the little boys have blue bottoms, and the little girls have pink bottoms," he explained. Mom laughed. Joan and I didn't get the joke.

After the fourth puppy was born, Mom and Dad were convinced that Cleo was through. They were pretty drunk with all the celebration of new life and needed to go to bed. Dad assigned Joan the job of checking on Cleo and her pups. "Don't maul them to death," he warned. Joan and I sat on the floor next to Cleo's box in constant vigil, watching the squirming pups. They weren't near as cute as I thought they would be. Not long after Mom and Dad went to bed, Cleo lifted her tail and another puppy came right out of her butt. We let her clean it up, and then Joan picked it up, turned it over on its back and said, "It's a girl."

"I forgot how many boys we have. Let's look," I said. We began inspecting all the puppy bottoms.

"Dad doesn't know what he's talking about," Joan said. "These are all girls." In the morning we told Dad that he was wrong and that all the puppies were little girls. That was our first and last sex education lesson from our parents. It was simply stated that boys had tally whackers and girls did not. "What do girls have?" I asked. "Ask your mother." I opened my mouth and Mom gave me the "not another word" look, and that was the end of it. Joan explained the whole thing to me a few years later while we were sitting in the car waiting for Mom and Dad to come out of a bar.

Cleo brought the same joy into our lives that Louis Armstrong did. She made us laugh. We could be meaner than snakes to each other but not to Cleo. There were many times that each one of us felt that Cleo was the only one in the family that was glad to see us.

Mom taught her to dance, say her prayers, shake hands, and be a dead dog. The funniest thing that Cleo did was sing to my dad. Dad would put on his shirt to get ready to go to town, and Cleo would pucker up her lips and say, "Ooooooooo!" Dad would giggle and say, "Come on Shit for Brains. Let's go." After Mom died, Cleo slept on the bed with Dad. Something we never got to let her do. She followed him everywhere.

Mom died when I was fifteen and left me alone with Dad. Joan had gone off to college and had gotten married. Dad and I had to learn to like each other. It wasn't easy. He was grieving and I was the product of two alcoholics. I had never been allowed to do anything outside of my own home, and now I didn't want to do anything. I refused to go to school. Every morning he would shout from his bedroom, "Deborah Ann, get your ass out of that bed and make me coffee." Every morning I made him coffee, and when he got up, I would tell him I was sick and go back to bed. I learned a long time ago that a sick person can't be blamed for anything. He hated that I wouldn't go to school, but he was too sad to do anything about it.

We had terrible fights, and he would tower above me and thump me in the chest with his finger, yelling, "Shut your goddamn mouth! Shut your goddamn mouth before I belt you!" The odd thing about it was that I didn't have my mouth open. Nobody in his right mind would have opened his mouth at that moment. I was terrified that he would hit me, but he never did. He hit me with words. Words like, "You'll never get married. No one will ever put up with your bullshit," and "You have no right to a goddamn opinion. When you're thirty years old you can tell me your opinion."

We also had times when we began to understand each other. We had long talks on the front porch, and long car rides to Texas. He taught me all about how beer and wine were made, and how Coca-Cola was better when you were sleepy than coffee. He told me about growing up in the oil patch in Texas and working with the mules that they used to move equipment in those days.

He told me about the Depression and how they were so poor that the Model T they had bought for fifty dollars was repossessed, and how his dad had to steal pipe from one oil field and sell it to another so that they could eat. He told me about a tornado that hit their house once. They could hear it coming and his dad put them all under the mattress and they all held on to it until they couldn't hear the wind anymore. When they climbed out from under the mattress, the roof of the house was gone.

We spent a lot of time together, and by the time I was seventeen, we shared a sort of mental telepathy. I could hand him tools before he asked for them. I would be in front of him handing him a rag before he could holler, "Deb, bring me a rag." Maybe I was trying to outguess him and stay out of trouble, but it was more. After I got a job and was on my own, I would dial his number. The phone wouldn't ring. The line was silent, but open. I could feel him on the other end. Finally, he would say, "Deb?"

"Dad? I was calling you."

"I was calling you!"

This happened so many times that it ceased to be coincidence. It was evidence of the bond that we shared. We needed and loved each other, and since we couldn't say those things to each other, we developed another way to express it.

Dad finally retired from the oil company and moved to Texas and lived with Joan. I was married to a wife-beater and working at the little hospital in our town. I seemed to be stuck in the oilfield, afraid to explore something different.

Each Christmas and summer, Dad would buy me an airline ticket to come and visit. I used to watch him with a grandkid on his lap reading *Go Dog Go* in his gravelly voice and think, *How come he never read me a story?*

Joan had a cat, three kids, and a lazy husband. Every time anyone came in or out of the house, the cat took the opportunity to sneak into the house. Naturally, the cat would head straight for Dad, because Dad hated cats — vehemently. "Who let that goddamn cat in the house?" he would roar. "Get him out of here or I'm going to kill the son of a bitch!" This went on day after day, year after year, cat after cat. One afternoon Joan came home from shopping, and as she was opening the front door, the bottom of the grocery bag broke, spilling groceries at her feet. With one foot inside and one outside and the door half open, she picked up the groceries. Within ten seconds she heard, "Who let that goddamn cat in the house? Get him out of here or I'm going to kill the son of a bitch!" Dad came chasing the cat down the front hall, his oxygen tube trailing behind. As the cat dashed for the door, Joan grabbed it by the scruff of the neck and practically slammed it in Dad's face. "You wanna kill the fucking cat? Here's the fucking cat!" she screamed. Dad looked at her blankly, as if cat killing wasn't even something he had ever thought of. "No," he said quietly. "I don't want to kill the cat." Joan slammed the cat

to the floor and screamed, "Then shut up about the fucking cat." The cat became an indoor cat after that. My niece even caught Dad playing with it with his sock. The cat and Dad were friends. Not for the first time, we realized that the terrifying and booming voice was covering up something much more expansive and much less aggressive.

I married the right husband and settled down into a teaching career and raising stepchildren. Joan married a new husband who enjoyed working more than the last one, and they moved into a new home. One summer I went to Texas for my niece's wedding. The plan was for my brother-in-law, Karl, to come and pick Dad and me up in time for the wedding. Dad took all morning to shower, shave, and get dressed. He had to stop so often to rest and gasp for air. Karl came about one o'clock, and Dad came out of his bedroom in his good black suit with a red silk tie. He was dragging his oxygen bottle behind him. "Well Fuzzy, you look real nice," Karl said.

"You'd better take a goddamn good look," Dad said, "because the next time you see me in this suit, I will be laid out in my box."

Time just froze for a minute as Karl and I considered that mental picture with our mouths open.

"Let's get this show on the road, goddamnit," Dad barked, and we went to the wedding.

The last summer, I spent a month with Dad. He had quit drinking three years before, and so we had more rational conversations. As he had on our trips to Texas when I was a teenager, he would tell me about the old days. Once we were sitting at the kitchen table, the oxygen machine was making its continual pssh noise, and the radio was playing big band music. He spread his hands out on the table — they were blue — and pushed himself back in the chair. Then, with his head down and in a quiet voice, he told me the story of the time he, his mom, and his little brother, Rene, went to visit the neighbor lady and her kids. They all stood around in an out building and visited. The lady had one son the same age as Dad and another the same age as Rene. The kids played while the women gossiped. There were old drums of diesel and various farm implements in the building. It came time to go home and cook supper, and Grandma and the kids started walking up the lane toward home. There was a huge explosion, and they turned and ran back to the building. Grandma's friend was hysterical. Her little boy was in there. There was no way to put the fire out and no way to enter the building. Dad told me this story and then looked up at me and said, "Evidently Little Harry threw a match into one of those barrels of diesel. They never found hide nor hair of him."

He told me many stories like that. Rural tragedies. He never showed any emotion when he told them, but his voice was kind and gentle — soothing, as if he was being careful to remember only the facts and not the emotions of the

events. Not for the first time I realized that Dad was a man who was afraid, and that anger and drinking were the only two ways he knew to cover it up. Now that he was too ill to be angry and too ill to drink, the history of the roots of his fear came out.

When Dad was in the hospital for the last time, he woke up one morning and said, "I'm going today." When the doctor came in on rounds, Dad told him, "You're at a wake, Doc."

The doctor was shocked and said, "No, Mister Miles. I don't think for a while that will happen."

"No, Doc. I'm checking out today." That was the end of the conversation.

He kept asking what time was it going to take place. We were all there around his bed, waiting. Nurses who had taken care of him over the last twenty years would come in the room, and he would tell them one last dirty joke, and they would leave sobbing. The respiratory therapist who had come to Dad's house every week, checked his oxygen tanks and drank a beer with him, was standing at the head of the bed, trying to put a dose of morphine in the breathing machine, weeping.

Suddenly Dad sat up and reached for me. I reached for his hand and he knocked my hand away. He was reaching past my hand. This happened three times. I was practically yelling, "What do you need, Daddy?" He reached one more time, said "Oh shit!" farted, and fell back on to the bed. He was dead.

At the funeral a friend of Joan's sang "When the Saints Go Marching In." In my mind I could hear Louis Armstrong on an old album that we had explaining how they did funerals in New Orleans: "And everybody would be walking behind the wagon, you see, then the drums would start, and then the trumpet would come in like this . . ." And then Louis's trumpet would ring through the sadness.

After the song Father Gonzo said, "Did you listen to the words? Did you hear the words? 'I want to be in that number when the saints go marching in.' We are all in that number, sinners and saints."

I like to think of my dad marching in that number. I like to think of Dad marching right up to Louis Armstrong and saying, "Thanks, Louis. You gave us some damn good times. Ya dig me?"

Louis would grin with that satchel mouth of his and say, "Solid, Jack."



Cuban "Flex-EE-blay" Dance*

BY JOYCE WILSON

Please learn and enjoy the Flex-EE-blay dance
in order to savor your tour.

Things here seldom work

or work out as they're planned,

so we dance around circumstance.

We do what we can or do what we must.

Most of the time, things even out,
sometimes they come out ahead.

You'll soon understand,

as you learn the new steps,

why Cubans have put the Flex-EE-blay dance

in their national treasure chest.

*The Cuban word for "flexible" is "flexible," pronounced as written in the poem.

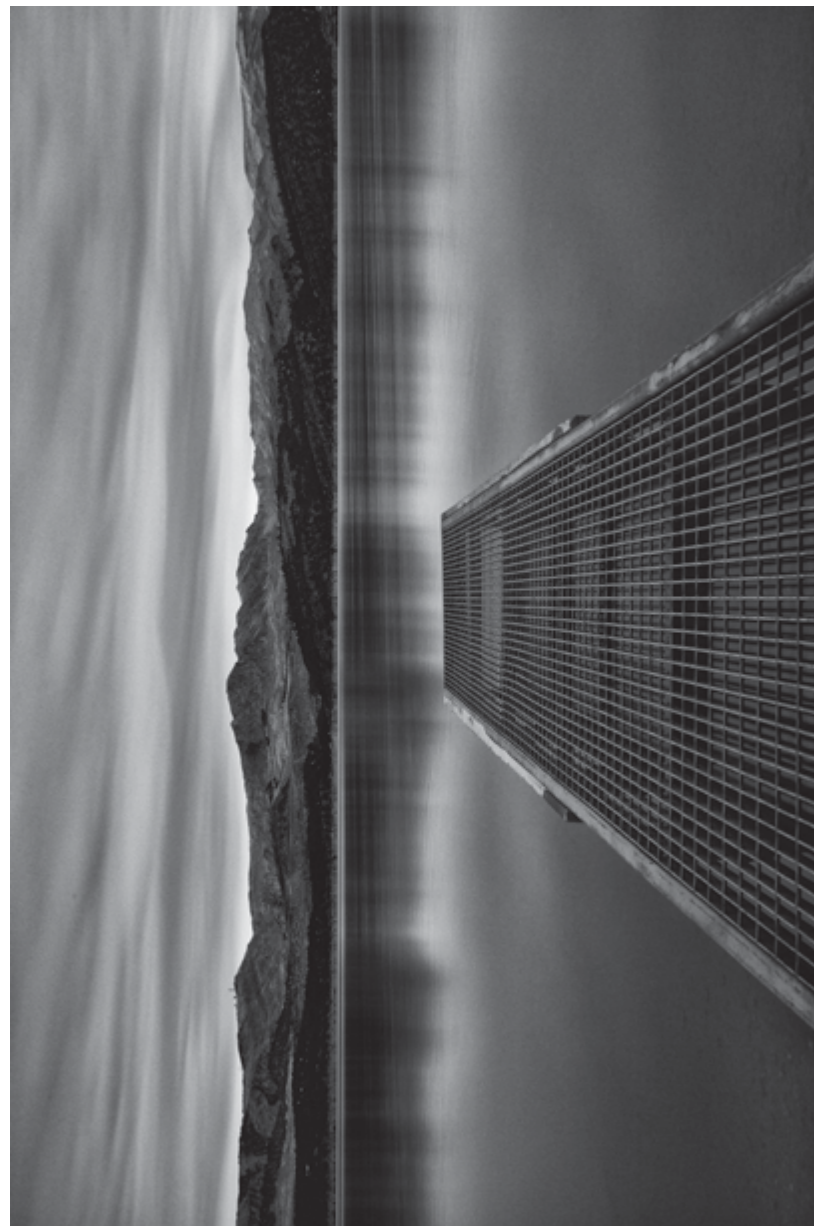
Passing of Time When I Was by the River

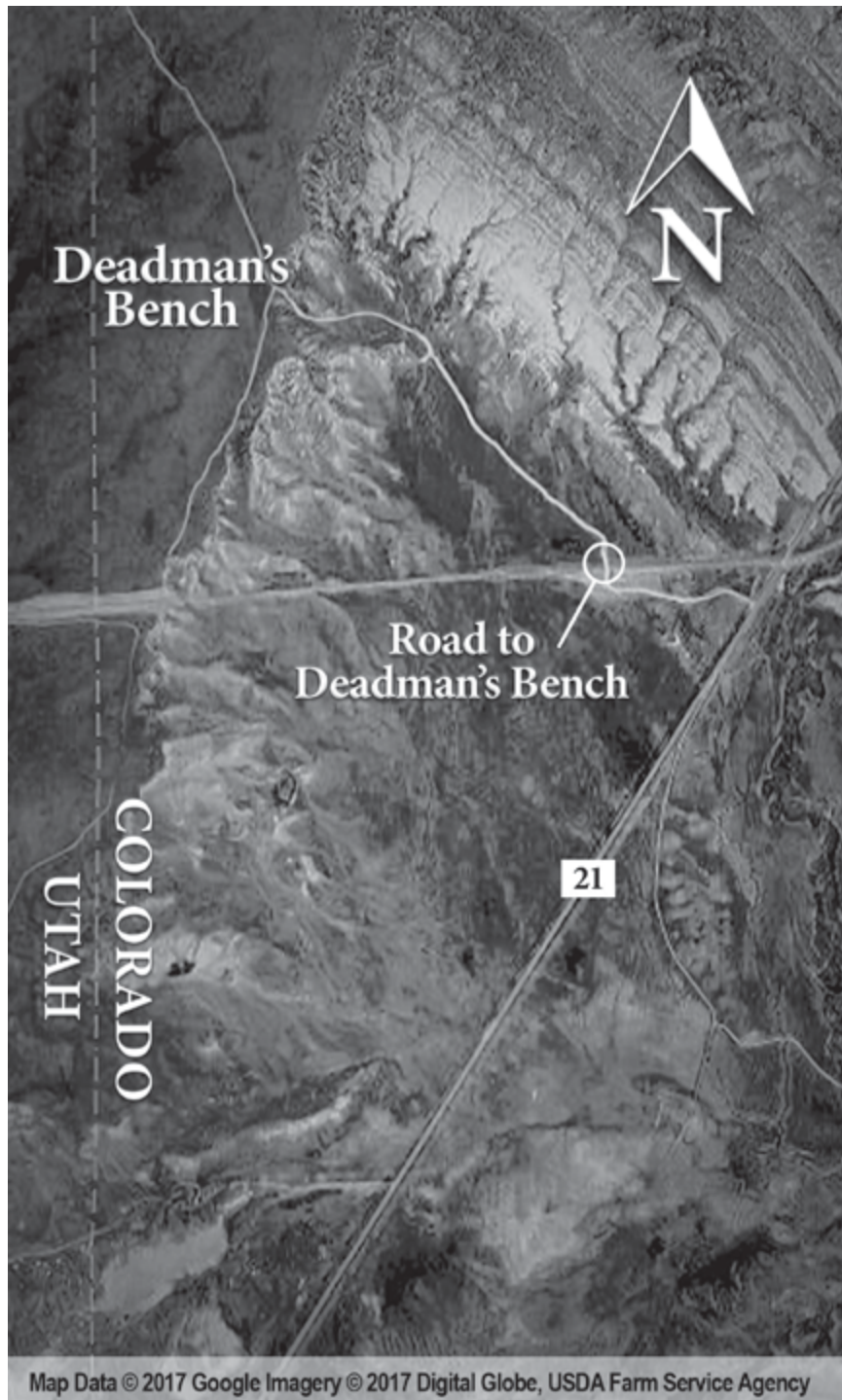
BY NIJOLE RASMUSSEN

I make a river
Upon which banks
I can sit with you
And listen to
The flowing stream of water.
Silent and comforting
I find passing of the water and time.

Timeless in me
Is aware of your presence
In my tomorrows and my yesterdays.
Timeless in me
Encompasses the lotus
With golden leaves
Opening gently
In the middle of the river.

Stream passes,
Oblivious of the time
Time passes,
Oblivious of the stream.
Behold, here I am
In the middle of it,
In the center of life's
Changing seasons.
Time must stop
If only for a short moment.
I want to swim in the river
And just be.
Without passing time,
Brushing my senses,
Without passing water,
Touching my skin.
Time and I am the same,
Timeless I find my soul
Swimming in eternity.





The Tale of Deadman's Bench

By JOE LIVINGSTON

A tale this is, no guarantee. I know of neither documentation nor a soul to verify the tale. The only monument to the deceased is an old shearing corral used by sheepmen for over a century on the Colorado-Utah border about 15 miles west of Rangely. One of the sheep outfits is the source of my story, which is as follows:

Around the time when Butch Cassidy, Sundance, and the Wild Bunch roamed the region, some nomads passing through found a body upon a bluff. The corpse was simply lying there, not another soul around. Well, what can the finders do? The decision was made to notify the sheriff. But which sheriff to notify? The one from Vernal, Utah, or the one from Hahn's Peak, Colorado? You see, when the body was found, neither Rio Blanco nor Moffat County had been established, so the closest Colorado sheriff was 150 miles away — in Routt County. To play it safe, word was sent both ways. The Utah Sheriff, being only about 35 miles away in Vernal, arrived first. Traveling by way of the Snake John Reef cutoff, his party arrived within a week or so, with a coffin in hand. Once at the location, however, the sheriff determined that the body was not in Utah and was therefore not Utah's concern. The Utah Sheriff loaded the body into the coffin, placed the coffin on top a pile of rocks, and returned to Vernal.

Colorado's Sheriff, 150 miles away in Hahn's Peak, was somewhat slower — about three months slower. Thus the coffin and its contents sat on the rocks, on the bench, for much of the summer. Henceforth, the dry bluff overlooking Dripping Rock Creek has carried the name Deadman's Bench.

The dead man of Deadman's Bench? I know not. Possibly a searcher for the diamonds of The Great Diamond Hoax, perhaps a crony of the Wild Bunch, or possibly a Ute or shepherd on a walkabout.

To find Deadman's Bench from Rangely, proceed west on Colorado Highway 64, turn left onto Rio Blanco County Road 21 (the road to Bonanza, Utah), proceed until you pass through Mormon Gap, and then turn right onto the next country road. Horses were used for many years to pull sheepcamps up this road. Almost immediately take another right and proceed up the hill past an old corral. You will then be on, or at least close to, what I have always known as Deadman's Bench. The map coordinates are 40° 08' 57" N and 109° 02' 36" W. The elevation is 5800 feet, high enough to be frigid in the winter, low enough to be withering in the summer, and open enough for the wind to howl. You will be on the high desert of Northwest Colorado and Eastern Utah; a high arid desert, filled with gullies, rocks, and tumbling tumbleweeds; and a place of beauty beyond belief to those who have been so fortunate as to have experienced one of the "right days."



RHONDA MALESKY | Scout Overlook, Zion National Park

Canyon

BY TAMARA GRUBBS

“A long time ago, everything was as it is now.”

“No it wasn’t,” Bertrand argued. “I mean, look at what we’re wearing. You’re not exactly in deer skins. And — what? You think *a long time ago* our ancestors had to build their fire in a tin can that can’t even produce enough heat to cook a hot dog? No way. Nothing was the same a long time ago as it is now. Not even — I mean, look — not even that rock over there was the same. Everything changes. People and laws and tech and even nature. Everything’s changed, and we can’t do a damn thing about it.”

The old Ute sighed. It pushed through flattened lips, long and low, escaping into a breeze that gusted through the canyon. In its escape the sigh deepened his knife-like wrinkles and hollowed out his dark eyes.

This is why you’re here. Because you never know when to shut the fuck up. The thought clung to the back of Bertrand’s tongue. Unlike his grandfather, he refused to wear disappointment on his face — no matter how hostile the flavor.

His foot trembled; a flagrant act of betrayal. He pressed his elbows into his thigh and dipped his head into his hands, weighing the foot into submission, forcing his body into a posture of poised stoicism.

He waited for his grandfather to speak again.

The old Ute was in no hurry. With a gnarled branch he prodded the fire that spit and flamed in a metal pit between them. His hands were dark, mottled and calloused, the knuckles large and knotted.

“It’s like a branch holding a branch,” Bertrand said. He realized this might be racist. Or ageist. Or some other — *ist*. Whatever the category, he probably shouldn’t have said it. Not out loud.

Maybe not even to himself.

Words were like that small fire: spitting and flaring and struggling with a volatile heat against containment. Because of his words, Bertrand was accused of having an — *ist* attitude, and this — not simply his excess of words, but their composition — was why he was at the bottom of a remote canyon on the western Colorado slope with an old man he’d met only a week ago. A man with whom, though they were related, he found nothing relatable.

The old man didn’t react. With gentle nudges he shifted the embers of their fire — a fire that couldn’t roast a hot dog. But the old man had insisted on lighting it, and he tended it now as if the fire was the reason they were in that canyon. As if he had brought the fire, not Bertrand, down into this mountain cleft. As if the fire would absorb his wisdom. As if the fire was the one searching for a name. The old

man hummed as he nudged. When he was satisfied with his nudging, he leaned the charred branch against the metal ring and continued to hum, directing his wordless song at the flame which in turn licked toward the old man's face.

Bertrand touched his backpack with his toe. Dirt as fine as powdered sugar coated most of the bag, his shoes, the hem of his jeans. He tried brushing it away but this only pushed the slick grains deeper into the fabric.

He rubbed his hands hard against his knees. He longed to pull out his ear buds, longed to thrust aside the old man's song with the help of Fall Out Boy. Five Finger Death Punch. Alabama Shakes.

The old Ute's music was like nothing he'd heard before.

The Ute's music was *different*. Different demanded his attention; attention demanded vocalization; vocalization was where he always went wrong, and it was hard — impossible, really — to disrupt the process once triggered.

A long time ago, everything was as it is now.

If only that were true.

His foot trembled again and he leaned into it until he felt the knob of his elbow form the tender beginnings of a bruise on his thigh. The vibration worked its way up his calf. Into his arm. It was a longing growl, a vile ache that pushed through inner fibers, coursing toward his tongue. No amount of upper body pressure would tame it.

"Hey, the rhythmic humming is cool and all. For a time. Maybe not all day. In moderation, right? So, don't you know any songs with words?"

His foot gave a final shudder and relaxed into a fitful rest.

The old Ute closed his eyes and nodded his head — a subtle dip that grew deeper as it settled into the music.

The words came as subtle as the nod. As subtle as breathing. The language was as old as life. It peeled back the mysteries of time; it gave answer to the crying questions of the universe.

If only Bertrand could understand it.

The Ute's face grew expressive as he sang, illustrating the song with a push of his cheeks, a quiver of his chin, the rise and fall of his brow. But even this meaning, pulped and spoon-fed, was lost on Bertrand. All he understood was his own ignorance.

Over the years he'd shuffled from family member to family member as each felt the call of responsibility for the semi-orphaned son of Denys Galey, a responsibility that proved too heavy a weight. Now, shuffled with force from the edges of the Galey clan, he'd been released to the dry winds of western Colorado — released to, not a clan, but a tribe. His mother's blood. His mother's kin.

He turned from the old man's expressive song. The entire desert basin was a dusty husk washed in shades of brown and dabbled with discordant bursts of muted khaki or goldenrod; this canyon was a narrow slice of that harsh wilderness, trapped between hills that swelled, tan and round like camels' backs. His grandfather had nestled their campsite at the base of one of these swells in a knee-high forest of brittle sage and dried grasses. To his right, an unsteady line of sand cut through the growth. The bed of a springtime stream. With his gaze he traced its flow through the curving layers of silt and sand, searching for signs of springtime life.

A tremor flexed the arch of his right foot. With it, a pulse of anxious anger flashed hot through his chest. He gasped at its sudden fury. Blinked. Looked again at the landscape with what felt like fresh eyes. He'd settled into analyzing lines of dirt. Dirt! The silent word crunched between his teeth, gritty and bitter. Dirt was his new curse. It coated the basin in a dusty dun — like silence coated discordant moments — like frowns coated his father's face — now it coated him. He was glazed in it, even down to the fine lines of his palms.

This experience was supposed to awaken something within him, to connect him to ancient lines that ran — literally ran! — through just such dirt and just such brush, that scaled just such a camel's hump of a mountain and sliced through cloudless skies on eagles' wings. To connect him to something long buried. An identity never broached. A hibernating Bertrand, rising into a new season, a spring of life separated from wrong words and bitter expressions.

Staring at the lines of dirt crossing his palms he suspected that those other lines, those ancestral strains, were nowhere within him. There was no hidden Bertrand for the old man to stir into wakefulness.

His leg trembled. Words bumped and tumbled in his chest, accumulating into a vomiting diatribe. Bertrand stood. It was so abrupt that he was erect, his back to the old Ute, before he realized the internal command.

In the same moment the song stopped.

He turned his head. The song was frozen on his grandfather's face, flipped by the switch of Bertrand's back. Bertrand turned toward him and the switch flipped again, but the song didn't resume. Instead his grandfather nodded.

You are right, Bertrand," he said, and continued to nod.

Though Bertrand didn't know what he was right about, he nodded, too.

His grandfather scooped up a handful of sand. He poured a line of the fine dun powder into the flames. The fire spit fiercely, fighting death, then fizzled and smoked. Bertrand felt something hollow open up at the fire's slow, inevitable smothering. He shushed it down. Filled it with words. Words were something he had an abundance of and now, as the final wisps of smoke dissipated into the wind, they did their job well.



Contributors' Notes



CAROL WILSON | *Autumn Owl*

SHAYNA ALLEN is currently a student at Colorado Mesa University. She is double majoring in Studio Art and K-12 Art Education. She created *Abstract Words* in her first sculpture class at CMU.

KEN BAILEY, 62, hails from Wisconsin, but grew up in Rangely. A hobby cartoonist since early school grades, Ken specializes in creating his own comic books. *Supercat #3* was “published” and distributed to Rangely Middle School students in 1968; current flagship *Mighty EnergyGirl* has 33 books to date, with two set in Rangely. (By day, Ken works for the Kohler Company, a global plumbing-ware manufacturer.)

PAUL BURGELL writes, “I am self-employed and live in Rangely. Around 1977 a friend showed me how to crease and fold metal and I remember telling the guy, “That’s really neat but, what do you do with it?” He replied, “I don’t know, but it looks cool.” It took over 30 years before I was inspired by a painting in a local restaurant, and I realized that maybe a flat piece of creased and folded metal could also be formed to mimic nature in 3-D. Anyway that’s what I did with it at the time.”

CARTER CHADWICK, a CNCC graduate, lives in Craig and is currently enrolled in Community Education classes in Pottery and Stained Glass. *Campus Light* is a photo of the full moon of December 12, 2016, illuminating the dynamic metal sculpture located on the CNCC Craig campus.

STEVE COCHRANE of Rangely photographed *Stillness Speaks*. He writes, “I try to focus on capturing the briefest of moments; the momentary eye contact with an animal, the light reflecting off a waterfall, and the transient light at dawn and dusk. All these aspects illustrate the beauty of nature and provide an everlasting impression.” stevcochranephotography.com

DEBORAH MILES FREITAG toasts you all in penny cheer from Mexico.

TAMARA GRUBBS writes, “I have a BA in Creative Writing from the University of Central Florida, where I published an undergraduate short story collection entitled *Blame*. My short story “The Call of Llyn Caldwell” won first place in the Young Adult Fiction Category of the Writer’s Digest 2016 Popular Fiction Awards and will be published on writersdigest.com in May-June 2017.

ANDREW GULLIFORD is a professor of History and Environmental Studies at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. He can be reached at gulliford_a@fortlewis.edu.

RENE HARDEN considers herself a “naturalist photographer” and for more than a decade has found ample subject matter around Rangely.

JANELE HUSBAND of Craig writes that *Bull Moose* was photographed near the west entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park.

MATTHEW HARWOOD writes, “I am a second year Aviation Tech student. I have been taking pictures for 7 years. *Positive Rate Gear Up!* shows of one of CNCC’s two Cessna 172RGs as the pilot raises the landing gear and flies off into a beautiful Rangely sunset.”

LEROY JAGODINSKI of Rangely writes, “I was fortunate to get photos of these rams at the base of Mt. Sopris by Redstone, Colorado. They were pretty far away, but I took a chance with my Canon Powershot and was able to bring home some nice pictures.”

JOSEY KING is currently a student at CNCC and Moffat County High School. In the fall of 2017, she will be attending Colorado Mesa University to study aquatic biology. She wrote this poem in the fall of 2016 in remembrance of her Grandma Jane.

JOSEPH LANSING writes that his painting *Last Chance* shows the remains of an old gas station and drive-in about 15 miles south of Hobbs NM. “It’s a flat frickin’ desert right through there, and I’m sure you could see the sign for miles.”

JOE LIVINGSTON, a life-long resident of Northwest Colorado, resides mainly in Meeker.

RHONDA MALESKY, a CNCC alumnus, photographed *Scout Overlook*, *Zion National Park*.

Contributors' Notes *Continued*

MICHAEL MELNECK comments that he published a poem when he was 11 and has called himself a writer ever since ... and he started taking pictures at 7 or 8 when he got a camera out of a box of cereal. He hopes to get better at both.

JENNY MEYER of Craig writes that *The 60s and Before* is "a photo montage that I created from my memories of the '60s and the hippie generation. This young woman was driving an old car that her father was restoring when she broke down as she was exploring petroglyphs in the desert."

DAVID MORRIS taught language arts for 35 years. He has published three books of poetry and has an unpublished novel. He tries his hand at a variety of art forms, and loves to let those creative juices flow.

SASHA NELSON of Craig studied photography at Colorado State University Pueblo and quilting arts while living in Melbourne, Australia. Her digitally manipulated photographic "kaleidoscopes" merge photographic and textile art techniques. Three of her kaleidoscopes hang in the Craig Academic building. She launched Colorado Kaleidoscope on Etsy earlier this year. *Breaking Free* started as an image of chain link on batik fabric.

NIJOLE RASMUSSEN writes, "I was a photographer and artist for about 12 years; still, my soul wasn't at ease, so I have started to write some poems, which were inspired by the events and feelings of my life. I find it fulfilling and comforting to express the vision of my soul through different media."

KATHY SIMPSON photographed *Pool Creek Sheep Wagon* on the Chew Ranch. According to Quayle Chew, "This photo is from Pool Creek. It was the homestead of my great-great grandparents, Jack and Mary Eliza. Sadly it was lost to us, but thankfully it is protected and interpreted, as Pool Creek is now part of Dinosaur National Monument." Kathy writes that *Guarded By Angel Wings* is "a view looking towards Mantle Cave."

CHRIS SOWERS, once a full-time biology/chemistry instructor at CNCC Craig, is retired now but recently returned as a biology adjunct. He writes that his poem "October Spell" is a recent work inspired by walking across a little foot path bridge over Fortification Creek here in Craig. This creek leads down to the Yampa River and has many stories to tell. "Comment Mourir" was inspired by observing the natural drama playing out between a garden spider and a moth out on my patio in Lafayette a year ago."

DONNA THEIMER, CNCC Craig Dean of Instruction, explains that "*Mountain Museum* is a collage from two photos that I took. The museum is the Museum of Art in Denver. The second picture is looking down the railroad tracks just outside of Loudy Simpson Park. I was trying to use a blending tool in a photography class just to see what would happen. Lo and behold the pictures fit together, with just a little tweaking, so well that the tracks should have been where the original stairway of the museum was."

ROBERT TRUJILLO is a psychology student at CNCC Rangely. Painting has always been a passion of his, and the

story he wrote here is a depiction of his first time graffiti painting. He has long since left those days behind him, saying, "I'm much too old to be getting arrested for coloring on the walls." While he does not practice graffiti anymore, he is a strong advocate for both hip hop and art in all of its forms.

SAMANTHA WADE of Rangely comments that her poem "Windows" was written while my father was alive with leukemia. In the first half, I shared how it felt to see my father fight through his treatment. In the last half, it was written after he had, unfortunately, passed away, but had left me with the strength that he had."

JOHN WILLEY is a chef by trade. He is originally from West Virginia, and after college he moved out West. Captivated by the ruggedness and beauty of western Colorado, he took up photography. Photography has motivated him to travel and see new sights. "It makes you see the world differently," he says.

CAROL WILSON writes of her photograph *Autumn Owl*, "This feathered friend was keeping both eyes on me as I sauntered closer to take my photo. He swiveled his head once, possibly to find an escape route if needed, but stayed put as I documented his perching power." *What an Adventure!* was photographed at "the geologic phenomenon known as 'The Wave.'"

JOYCE WILSON writes that her poem "Cuban 'Flex-EE-blay' Dance" "encapsulates our Road Scholar tour leader's introduction to Cuba in April 2016. We learned its meaning well during our 15 days in the country."

DONNA THEIMER | *Mountain Museum*





SASHA NELSON | *Breaking Free*



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