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The Ninth Gunnison Valley Journal

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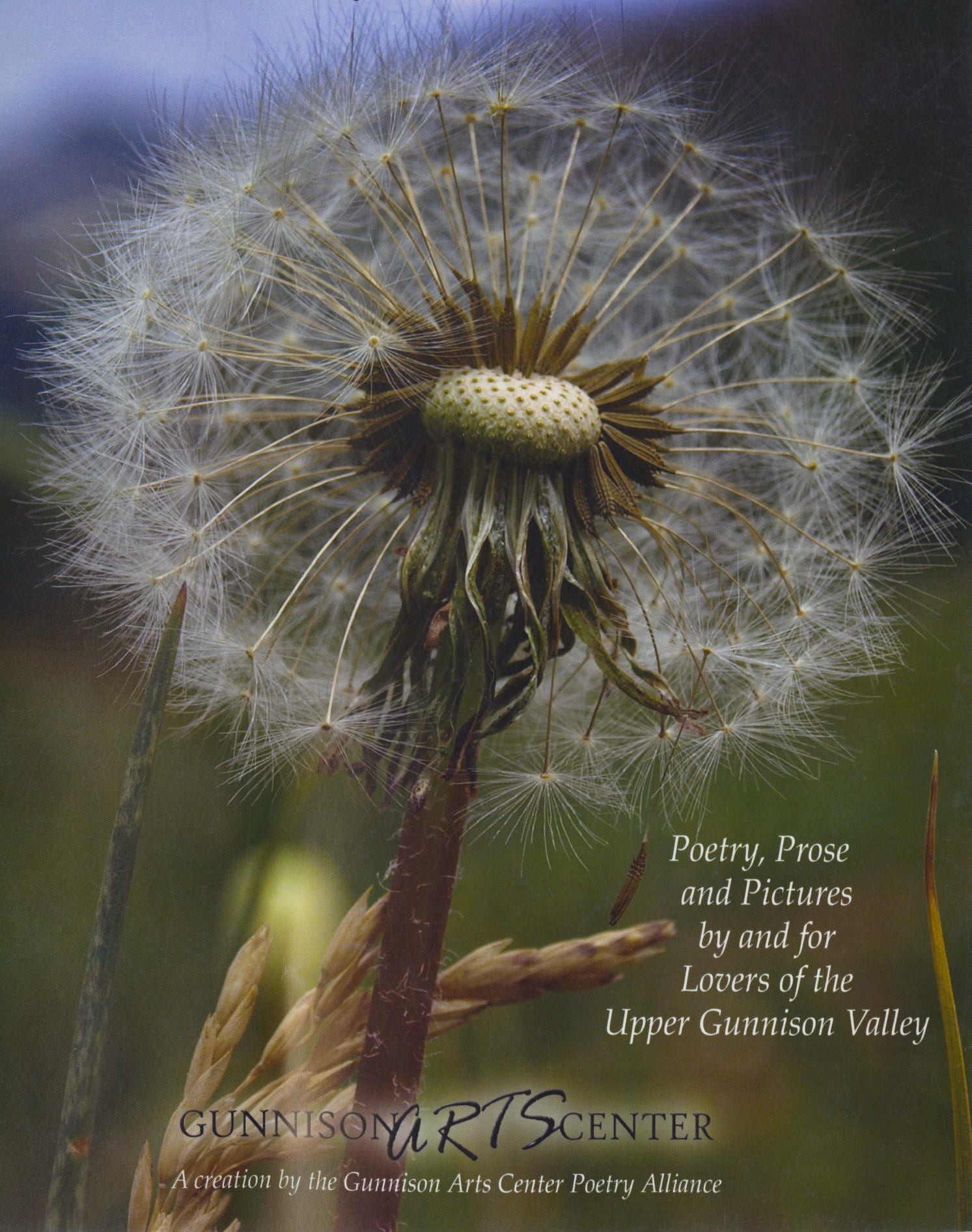
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Virginia Jones – Betty Light – Dave Pinkerton – Judy Buffington Sammons
George Sibley – Marcie Telander – Rita Bohn and Bob Wotjko

We hope you've enjoyed this free issue of the Gunnison Valley Journal.

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Community/Common Unity

Gunnison Valley Journal - 9th Edition



*Poetry, Prose
and Pictures
by and for
Lovers of the
Upper Gunnison Valley*

GUNNISON ARTS CENTER

A creation by the Gunnison Arts Center Poetry Alliance



Community/Common Unity

Pick up a newspaper, or log onto the electronic equivalent, and it's easy to hear words like "partisanship" and "divisive" and "polarized." It doesn't have to be national media – certainly there have been several flash-point issues locally that have left people at loggerheads.

But if you turn to the "letters to the editor" section of our local newspapers, every single week, there will be one or more letters from locals and visitors alike, thanking individuals, families, groups or even entire towns for lifting someone up in a down time. The consensus of these letters is: what a great place to live.

One of these letter writers, writing from a place no parent ever wants to be, summed it up in the phrase we have chosen for our theme: "our common unity – our community." (You can read Crested Butte poet Erin Garcia's entire letter, reprinted with her permission, on page 4)

While there may be things wrong with our world, our nation, our state and even our valley, what we ought to know is that there are also many things that are right, and that is what we once again would like to celebrate with the ninth edition of the Gunnison Valley Journal.

The Journal draws on all the strengths of our valley: our young people, our elders, and those in between. This is a community paying tribute to our common unity, celebrating the people of this area as well as its physical beauty.

Our hope as you read this – whether you live here year-round or seasonally, or are just passing through – is that you find yourself thinking: what a great place to live.

–The Journal Staff:

Virginia Jones, George Sibley, T.L. Livermore, Mark Todd, Betty Light, Kirsten Dickey

A production of the Gunnison Arts Center Poetry Alliance

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Photo by Jan Badgley

My Retreat

By Virginia Jones

Deep cerulean blue with windswept cloud,
backdrop for autumn's gold, touched with salmon,
Bring inspiration to me on the deck, but thoughts
float through the top of my head, through my skin,
into the air, and shatter in the landscape.

I must go to my retreat.

To this room where angled ceiling planes
Reflect the changing light,
Encase my thoughts and send them back into my head
To filter through my fingertips to paper,
To share with others a piece of heart and mind.

Awaiting Winter

By Betty Light

Clouds sweep the sky and end in curled piles.
A jet trail carves a line in empty sky.
Tarnished leaves remain on aspen boughs.
The mountain is clear, cold and still.
The valley holds its breath, waits for winter.

Day Dreaming

By Kim Eastman

I am a stranger to you
Yet, I know you
I have dreamed of your freedom
Felt the wind flow across my body
Felt the sun's warmth and the shadow's coolness
I have circled on wind currents until I could reach the clouds
I have looked down on the dusty, sage-covered earth
and witnessed my destiny
I have dreamed of soaring over the flowing river
and known I am bound
I have flown miles, yet gone nowhere
I have perched up on the limb of the ancient pine
and surveyed the changing landscape
Maybe I am not such a stranger to you after all
For I have soared on your wings

Phoebe Cranor

1923-2010

Phoebe Cranor was a writer, gardener, ranch wife, preacher, mentor and disciple of God. She wrote books about her life and about her faith, and she wrote poems about everything. This is a sample of her poetry. She wrote something for every Gunnison Valley Journal over the years.



Discovery on a Summer Afternoon

I was on my knees among the tulips
Clad in the most disreputable clothes.
My hair and face were wet with perspiration,
I could feel a smudge of mud across my nose.

The children, turning somersaults behind me,
Were shouting in their wildest sort of way.
The dog was barking loudly as he watched them.
The cats had run and hidden from their play.

My husband came up quietly from somewhere
And knelt beside me on his well-patched knees.
We heard a different bird song in the distance
And, stopping, turned our eyes up to the trees.

I looked at our four grubby hands together
And listened to the children laugh and shout.
I thought back to our wedding unbelieving.
We hadn't guessed what love was all about.

Difference of Opinion

"I think it's spring," the pansy said
As he shook his purple velvet head.
A cloud came by and dumped some snow
And winter growled, "I told you so--
It isn't spring. Go back to bed."
"I think it's spring," the pansy said.

Prayer for Old Age

(Written before I got to be old)

Nearer and nearer
Comes the day
When I too shall be old,
Oh God.
Forgive me now
For my impatience.
Fit me--no, guide me to help
Fit myself --
That I may be old
Joyously;
That I may still
See fairy houses
Under broken roots
And diamond necklaces
On a black spider web;
That I may hear the laughter
Of children
As music
And not as pointed arrows
To pierce my ears.
May I love more, even more,
And give of myself
In love.
Fill me now
With Your Presence
Dear Lord. And oh please
May I fly to the tallest branches
And be singing
When I die?

A 2:47 a.m. Letter to the Common – Unity

Printed in the Crested Butte News, April 2, 2010. Maddison Garcia was in St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction, following a serious skiing accident. Madi is recovering well from her accident.

Randy and I are sitting in an ICU room watching our 19-year-old baby's chest take tiny, labored breaths. She is being re-trained to breathe on her own, slowly. Her eyes have been closed to the world for days, and I can't help wonder what she is hearing, dreaming, remembering. Her Tibetan prayer beads hang just to the right of her head, above the still-shattered humerus bone awaiting its turn on the operating table.

I am learning more about trauma medicine than I ever wanted to know. I did not know, for example, that a multiple large-bone fracture was life threatening. I did not know that the lungs can be injured from the things that are also saving her, like blood transfusions and operations.

I am stunned by all the medicines, procedures and protocols that save lives everyday. Marveling at all the people that have dedicated their lives to mastering these tools and have given up so much of their personal lives and sleep to rescue perfect strangers from imperfect situations. That each night, all around this country, at 2:47 a.m., a nurse is managing care for a broken-up, well-loved teenage girl, and a lonely liver transplant patient with the same intensity and dedication.

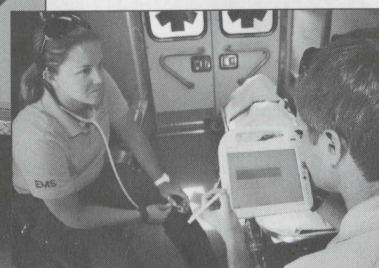
These are the things that keep this world intact, sane and meaningful. "Faith is believing in that which you cannot see," and yet, it is all around us in full sight here, at Saint Mary's. Tonight, Sunny, Randy and I have not allowed the two-person-per-room rule to apply to us. We are all sleeping in chairs and recliners by Madi's side, and these nurses are tolerating our eccentric ways. We have pushed their limits with day visitors, and we are grateful they have just let us find our way with this unthinkable change in our little world.

And then, outside these hospital walls, is our common-unity, community.... Crested Butte. Calling in all the prayers and energies this past Saturday, you all reached Madi tangibly here. She took her first major positive turn that night. Really. I know it was all of you. Thank you.

Madi is still in ICU. Life support is not just a medical machine helping Madi with her recovery. Life support is the people that we gather around us in community. Life support is the unseen force that assures the aspens will green each spring. It is that which fills our hearts in churches, temples, meditation pillows, on a mountain top. It is here in the still hours of the night, in a hospital room, in a Colorado town, on a spinning blue ball, in a universe of mysteries.



Thank you,
Sunny, Erin, Randy and Maddison Garcia



*Thanks from the
Valley for the
people who are
always there
for us....*

Photos courtesy Gunnison Valley Health

Sweet

By David J. Rothman

I hadn't brought my skis. It was late May and we were just back in town for the weekend. And it had been a big snow year but I figured some of the bike trails would be open, even if just the low ones. I was looking forward to getting on my bike and prowling around. I could handle a little mud.

As we came over Monarch and down into the Gunnison Valley we got the first sign that biking just wasn't going to happen. 1,500 feet below the base of the lifts the valley looked like a drowned rat. North-facing hillsides still had enough snow to bury the sage and even the south facing pitches sported big cornices and long vertical ribbons of deposition where snow had built up in the lee. The river sprawled out over the valley floor and looked more like a lake. Even the weather was shaking its head, a storm moving in with low clouds running from the southwest.

Up in town, there were large piles of dirty snow on the north side of every building and where the plows had stored it, all kinds of trash slowly coming to light. At a time of year when people are usually at least trying to rake their lawns, this year they were still assessing the damage. The upper crossbeams of every fence and railing were broken. An external staircase had been ripped right off the side of our house. What a year to move down to the Front Range, even if most locals who had stayed for off-season had a slightly demented look. "Yeah, a big year," they'd say, "Over 400 in town." A pause, and then, "I can't believe it's snowing again."

Because it was. Rain and flakes, a mix, but soon enough to stick. I didn't even take my bike off the car. Then the next day, with snow on the deck, I started scavenging in the garage. I dug up a dusty pair of orange Tecnica alpine race boots and some huge powder boards, Dynastar Bigs. An old ratty pack, some rusty extendable poles, a hat, bibs with a busted zipper, burly winter slip-on sneakers with big treads.

Emily said "You're doing what?" And I said I was just going to climb the area, see what's going on, there was nothing else to do anyways. She shook her head, as she usually still does after more than twenty years. I don't mind.

It's been a long time since I've gone backcountry skiing by carrying an entire alpine rig on my back. It re-

mined me of hiking into Tuckerman Ravine in high school. I started up at the base of the hill where management had plowed out the roads and there was perhaps two inches of wet fresh snow. Still, it was obvious that there was continuous skiing to the base more than six weeks after the lifts had closed. There was no one else around and no tracks.

A thousand feet up and out of view of the base area, there was now four inches of snow and it was beginning to dry out. The road cut above Upper Park was over my head and the snow so dense I began to wonder if it was going to transform into glacial ice before it ever melted. When I reached the top of the Queen, 2,200 feet above the base, there was six inches of new snow and the top several inches were getting fluffy. The sun was peeking in and out of the clouds and temps were in the high 20s. I began to get that feeling, you know the one: I'm going to get lucky. The stars are aligning. I'm holding the right lottery ticket.

My ankles were soaked above the winter sneakers, but I had dry socks in the pack. And that pack was heavy. Even if I had no one to blame but myself, I did feel a bit like a slave of the ancient Egyptians, carrying a block of granite on a tump line up an incline steep enough to choke a donkey. But at the top of the High Lift, 2,700 feet above the parking lot, it was winter. The storm had broken, but streamers of gray winter cloud were protecting the snow from the full force of the spring sun. The northern wind washing around the back of the exiting storm also kept things cool and I layered up. Pulled the extra socks, lay down my heavy load, changed footwear and locked in. The snowpack underfoot was still deeper than it often is in early March.

As I wrapped around the traverse to the top of the Headwall, luck didn't just smile – she grinned, she smirked, she laughed and did a little dance. The wind had blown across the ridge and loaded up the slope until the new snow was about eight inches deep. The surface underneath was frozen so hard I would have needed a chisel to dig a pit and it must have been ten feet deep – the line fell away at more than 40 degrees for over 700 vertical feet and looked about as smooth and soft as the underbelly of a Kashmir goat.

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Photo by John Nelson

Sweet

Continued from previous page

All the effort of lugging that alpine gear up there was worth it for the way it performed. There was enough new snow to fly up over my shoulder and slough a bit on each turn. At the apex of every arc my edges connected for a fraction of a second with the frozen, buried corn and gave a gentle, floating snap to the next move. The sun was in and out, shadows of clouds running across the pitch. A light breeze. Not another creature in sight except for a few small birds. It seemed to last forever, though it couldn't have been much more than 90 seconds. At the bottom I turned and looked back up, snapped a picture on my phone. Then I just stood there and drank it in.

Skiers and snowboarders have a word for this kind of thing. I'm talking about that moment when everything we've ever done or learned meets great snow on a beautiful day in the right place and it all snaps together like the last piece of a beautiful puzzle, or the perfect rhyme, or a first kiss. Luck? Too random. Epiphany? Accurate, but a bit heavy on the religious connotations. Serendipity? Too literary. Timing? Sort of dry. Synchronicity? Too pop-psychological. Grace? Well, in my heart I feel that's

true, but it sounds pretentious.

But you're a skier so I expect you'll understand when I use what may be the best word we have, a word that says so much about what life can be when it's as good as it gets. You know this word and you know how and when to use it. You can probably even imagine how you would say it, how it should be said, how it can roll off the tongue and lips, slowly, with a sparkle in the eye and a small nod of the head, how much it can convey when it's said right. It's the word that resonated in my mind, turn after turn, back down through the mush zone, then the corn zone and into spring. It was the word that kept coming to me as I walked across the muddy parking lot and drove back into town, savoring every moment, filled with gratitude.

You know what I'm talking about. Go ahead and say it. Say it to yourself even if you're alone, maybe especially if you're alone, to conjure it, to make sure you remember it exists, to keep it alive.

Come on, say it.

Sweet. ■

The Old Horses

By John Nelson

Sometimes I get a restless feeling,
a yearning hard to explain,
A need to soothe an uneasy soul,
to let spirits soar again.

Then I go out among the horses
just to watch them move,
To know the peaceful fluid wander,
The rise and fall of hoove.

I go there just to be alone
yet not to be alone at all.
Their nicker warms a place inside.
My spirit heeds their call.

I know each one by a given name,
and they all know me.
Some are just like old friends.
Some don't care to be.

For some we've partnered twenty years,
others a year or two.
Some bring back precious memories
of the things we used to do.

And, I worry about these old ones
whose usefulness has passed.
Oh, they were proud, they earned their keep.
But, good times just don't last.
How can I afford to support them
at the cost of land and feed?
With swayed backs and rheumy eyes,
they've lived beyond their need.

There's those who'd say I'm foolish
for keeping horses past their prime,
That you can't run a charity
and do business the same time.

They say that there's no value in mounts
that do not earn their hay.
That money spent on boarding them
is money thrown away.

But, value isn't always measured by
the amount of work that's done.
And, sometimes on cold mornings
when those old ones buck and run,

It brings back the spunk and spirit
of those early days we rode,
Renews my smile, and that makes them
worth more to me than gold.

I Am

By Judy Cox

I am the horse
Black, shining
Shaking its mane
Loosing its ropes
Rearing up, hooves high
Seen against the mountain
Whetstone, new snow.

This horse's prayer
Is not supplication,
But exclamation!
Times to come,
Pounding hooves
Over all impediments.

Rising like Pegasus
To the stars
And beyond
FREE.

Home Sick

By Shelley Read

I envy my cat and dog
for more reasons than many
but today for the way each stretches
languidly in the white sun pouring
through my home's southern windows.
The black cat is splayed belly up on the carpet
like a snoozing beach tourist,
half-drunk and overfed.
The dog, the color and curl of a warm croissant,
is snoring on the illuminated sofa.
They breathe richly and,
deep in their mysterious animal dreams,
occasionally twitch.

I am rarely home at this hour.
I knew nothing of the southern sink of the December sun,
how the light stretches all the way across the living room—
which seems grander now than at other hours and more lush—
nearly to the north wall where the piano sits silent
and the toys stack atop each other in the wicker basket
like a stilled circus act.
The refrigerator hums its low tones,
the mantle clock snaps a perfect rhythm.
I feel strangely like an uninvited guest,
or a school girl overhearing a secret
that should not have been a secret,
not from her anyway.

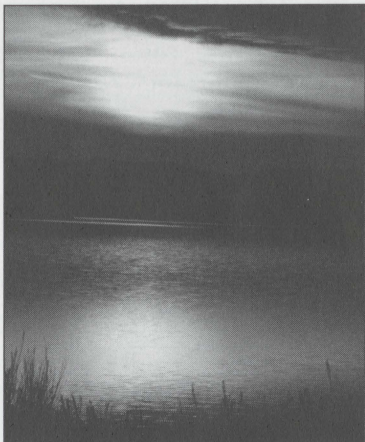


Photo by Robert Valdez

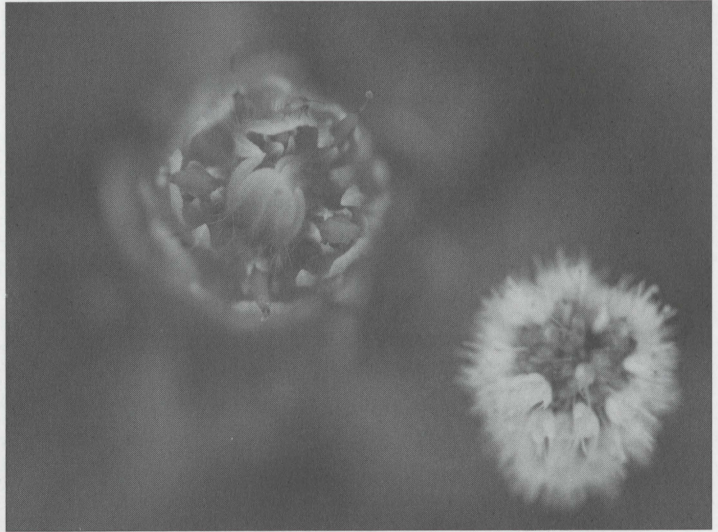


Photo by Linda Nienhueser

On an average day, my family and I rise with the sun,
eat and dress and race time, rush to our duties,
return post-sunset with a hunger for dinner and each other.
We are loud with cooking and music and outbursts;
we undo and redo tidiness; we dance and argue and tickle;
we sleep. In the absence of the usual bedlam,
this house is like a movie set awaiting its actors,
the cat and dog, the piano, the toys seem mere props,
temporarily left out of the storyline,
paused,
released until the action begins again.

I wish I knew more of what the cat and dog know
about this house,
how most hours it is a retreat of silence and respite,
how the pillowed couch beckons,
saying a long nap in the sun is no rare delicacy
but a key ingredient to a good day.
I wish I knew more of what the cat and dog know
about unapologetic rest,
about luxury.



Photo by Jan Badgley

A lesson from the birds and the bees and flowers

By Sandy Fails

I could never understand how “the birds and the bees” got associated with sex; I can’t see that they have much to teach us in the realm of gratifying sexuality. But the birds and the bees — and their wildflower hosts — have a lot to teach us in other areas, such as marketing.

We egocentric humans tend to think those fields of blazing wildflowers were created for our visual and olfactory pleasure. Not so. We are actually viewing some fierce competition in floral self-promotion.

Rocky Mountain Biological Lab scientist Paul Buck recently expanded on what I’d learned in grade school. To reproduce, flowering plants depend on pollen carried from one plant to another by insects and hummingbirds. The plants compete with each other to get these “tourists” to visit, chow down on some nectar and stomp around in the pollen, then travel on to other flowers of similar type and wipe their dirty feet (a mode of reproduction that, like the birds’ and the bees’, sounds decidedly less fun than ours). To survive, the flowers must entice those visitors, reward them and make them want to come back. Sound familiar?

Since flowers have been successfully doing this, without so much as a marketing v.p. or inter-floral memo, for a few eons now, we tourist-dependent resort residents should take a few notes.

First observation: focus of clientele. Different types of flowers do not look alike. Each flower markets to the specific insects or birds most likely to enjoy its nectar. Is its nectar best suited for hummingbirds, flies or ants? Once the best-fit clientele is identified, the flowers go all out. Those nectar-loving hummers like red? Then show ‘em red. Market red. Flaunt red. Let ‘em know you’ve got the particular nectar of their dreams, not that nasty old stuff that moths like. Plants have survived across the ages by proudly stating their identities, not copying from other plants that compiled impressive bug visitation statistics. The lesson here: If you’re red, don’t spend a lot of time trying to make yourself look blue. Those blue-partial types won’t like your nectar anyway.

Second observation: marketing approach. Plants produce bright, beautifully shaped flowers to get the insects’

Continued on following page

A lesson from ...

Continued from previous page

attention, lure them closer with a sweet fragrance, then provide visual signals and sometimes even landing pads to make access easier. We're already on top of some of these practicalities, with bright, colorful brochures and advertising, personal service to interested inquirers, increased air service and airport improvements.

Third observation: follow-through. Luring those bugs in for a visit won't help a bit unless they find the nectar they're expecting. If they're impressed, they'll continue visiting similar plants, happily delivering pollen as they tour. If they're not impressed, they'll switch to daisies, nipping your reproductive efforts in the bud. Moral: Market what you deliver and deliver what you market.

Flowers figured all this out in the PC (pre-consultant) days, without even database software or industry publications. They've got my respect.

My empathy, too. Trying to make a go of it in a small, high-mountain resort town might seem tough to us, but our botanical role models have stuck it out through much worse. We complain about our long off season. Dr. Buck explained that high-altitude plants may have only 45-60 days to grow, photosynthesize, flower and produce seeds before the snows cover them over again. That leaves 10 1/2 months of floral off season. Maybe we don't have it so bad after all.

We also bemoan having to share our town with some pretty strange visitors, people who talk funny, dress funny and act funny. We should consider that wildflowers depend on all kinds of creepy bugs for their survival. If scarlet gilia can respectfully host the mites that commute in and out of hummingbird nostrils, I guess we can accommodate a few fur-booted flatlanders.

Like Dr. Buck, I particularly admire the stronger, smaller, subtler flowers that grow in the harsh high-alpine regions. These miniature plants overcome mighty challenges. To protect themselves from the intense radiation up where the air is so thin, they develop special pigmentation, often giving them a reddish hue. Since frosty nights can be the rule even in summer, they produce a natural anti-freeze. And since the winds and cold attack relentlessly, they hug the warm earth, saving their beauty for those humans who bother to get down on hands and knees to observe. No passing-Winnebago appreciation of these guys. Perhaps I love these flowers the most because they remind me of Crested Butte. While the Vail-flowers of the world grow gaudily at highway-side, Crested Butte seems reserved for people who take the time and effort to find its subtler, deeper, stronger beauty. ■



Paintings by Trudy Jagger

Sparrow Song

The world gives itself as it is
in cottonwood leaves yellowing
and falling gracefully,
the river pushing its muddy path
past sparrows that fly and sing

All they do is fly and sing—
defy heaviness and offer beauty
Each sound, sight
each simple second
is a love song written
just for me

I accept every one,
and wonder
why
does no one else grab them

Here is my lament
All I have to offer in return
to a world that grinds
stones into sand
but lets birds fly
through the yellow leaves
and sing above the river's rush
is my belief in kindness

a belief that lives in
the darkest cave of my soul
and guides every motion
because I know
that people robbed of kindness
are deaf to any love song

Yet I still hear them,
every second
hear them
and breathe them in
like air.

Love Song

From the top of the Ferris wheel
above the chaos of dust and light
I can see an entire universe
of life cupped in this wide valley.
One small town at the crossroads
of rivers and abandoned railroads

Familiar voices rise above the clatter
of metal rockets and roller coasters
of carnival callers and cars,
of the imported southern
twang of a rodeo announcer
booming beyond the grandstand

I can hear the sound of my son
marveling at his friend's waving hand
and sparkling eyes, far below
the unremarkable height of this wheel
And I realize that everything that matters
is within my reach and sight

His hand grabs mine as he marvels
at seeing his whole world simultaneously,
the cliffs marking the river's bend
in our willowy backyard,
the construction site we pedal by daily
to see the resurrection of his school

Through his eyes I can see this place
with his reckless optimism
So that I may grant him
the unique privilege of youth,
to enact his dreams
in a place where they might come true

This town is far from everything,
including perfection
but on some summer nights
when even the mountain breeze
is warm at sunset
there are perfect days.

Poems by Susan Powers

Gunnison Memories

By Trudy Jagger

My mind becomes clear in this place I hold dear.
Rodeo styles, bright stars for miles.
Wind blows, creek flows.
Bright sunshine, hummingbirds dine.
Horse trails, hawk's tails.
Circle of life, struggle and strife.
Kisses and tears, hopes and fears.
Mountains proud, promises vowed.
Valleys grand, priceless land.
Elk and deer, grazing near.
Rivers rushing, spirits hushing.
Fields of flowers wild, winters never mild.
Historic towns and mines, majestic lodgepole pines.
Do not dismay, my soul will stay.
Whispering prayers, to visiting bears.
This is the place, on all of Earth's face,
Where life's held above all things except love.



Photo Matt Burt

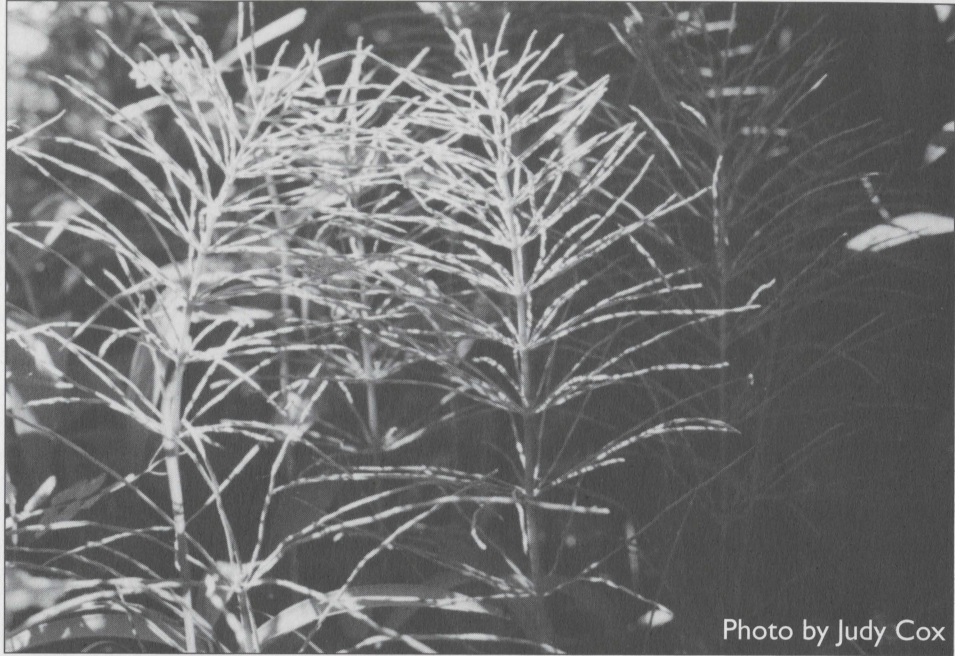


Photo by Judy Cox

Goodbye, City Life

By Julie Leukenga

I credit Gunnison with saving my life. OK, if not saving it, at least adding a couple years on to it and lowering my cholesterol. When my husband and I moved to Gunnison with our 3-year-old son in 1993, I was overwhelmed by its beauty. I was in awe of the mountains, hypnotized by the flowing rivers, and charmed by its small-town hominess. I was also a little unhinged by the vast change of lifestyle I was encountering. I mean, seriously, where were the malls? Where were the big chain restaurants? How would we find meaning in Saturday mornings without the big, greasy skillet that Village Inn made?

We had moved to this area for a job I had been offered at the college. It didn't take many days with my colleagues to realize I was a bit of a fish out of water, or perhaps more aptly, the City Mouse. I felt like Eva Gabor's character in "Green Acres". For example, I had, shockingly, never heard of Texas. I didn't know "Columbia" referred to more than my favorite coffee, and I certainly didn't know people actually could spend more on their bikes than in their cars. I was a city transplant: I made sure my hair was properly coiffed each day and my make-up impeccable before I headed to work. It was like that Sesame Street singing game: Which one of these, is not like the

other?

One of my earliest outdoor adventure experiences was right after I first arrived in Gunnison. My husband and son had not yet moved here, and I still didn't know a lot of people, so I had a lot of time to fill on the weekends. One weekend, I decided to hop on my bike and ride out to the lake by myself. Back then, I didn't know any better and wasn't the least bit embarrassed by my ten-speed from high school (at least now I know my toys are low-tech). I pedaled out feeling pretty good about myself. Why, I felt so good, I decided to go a little farther and even a little farther, never giving thought to having to turn around and travel that distance back again. What was I thinking? Easy answer, I wasn't. Pretty soon, keeping an eye on my time, I reluctantly decided to head back home.

I was just about back to Neversink when the foolish reality hit me: I was not in shape for this. I ached and was thoroughly fatigued. Somehow I managed to force my feet to keep pushing and finally made it back to our little rental house. I remember very little except being bone weary and very hungry when I gratefully stumbled through the front door. My legs were shaky noodles. I put water in a pot to boil something edible.

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Goodbye, City Life

Continued from previous page

Thinking I would just lay down on the couch for a little bit, I soon fell fast asleep and slept so hard I didn't notice the pan had boiled dry. Fortunately I woke up in time to remove the pot from the stove, but only long enough to drop it in the sink and fall back onto the couch.

The next weekend, having had the week to recover and evidently develop amnesia, I headed back out to the lake (this time in my car, my foolishness having a few limits) to hike up the path to the Dillon Pinnacles. I felt like a mighty hiking warrior, a true mountain woman. That is until people practically skipped past me—come and go—just on a light, recreational “stroll”. No doubt about it, I was an unseasoned “newbie” in this world.

Sometime during the first couple years I lived here, I let my coworkers convince me to go on a team-building, cross-country ski trip. It would be great, my fit boss Layne tried to convince me. What did she know? She was a thin, sinewy-muscled, biking zealot trying to convert me. I was on to her. But pride is a dangerously motivating and foolish bully. Before I knew it, I was learning how to snap my boots into these long skis. “It’s like walking and pushing and gliding,” I was told. That was one too many verbs to try to coordinate. I’m quite sure I held the group up that day and probably did several face-plants in the snow, but everyone was patient with me, and before long I was admiring the scenery, chatting (probably through gasping breaths) and actually enjoying the outing.

As the years progressed, no longer able to resort to “mallng” and other city hobbies, I tested the waters of different activities. My friend LuAnna took me mountain biking at Hartman Rocks. It was much tougher than it looked, and I decided this was one activity I would check off my list—too much thrill for me.

This same athletic Wonder Woman convinced me to hike over West Maroon Pass from Crested Butte to Aspen – and back. Feeling full of super human powers, we decided we would spend the night in Aspen and hike back the next day. We knew we were in trouble when the shuttle bus driver who took us from Aspen to the Maroon Bells trailhead asked over the bus microphone system, “And what did you two

girls do to train for this hike to and from Aspen?” People turned to us with admiring expectation. We looked blankly at each other. Train? I spent the next three weeks consistently uttering a pain-filled “Oy!” whenever I tried to sit or stand. Or bend. Or lay down. Or breathe.

Several summers ago, my friend Suzanne (really, as I write this, I realize I need a few more sedate, Scrabble-lovin’ friends) invited me to hit the lake and try out her kayaks. By now, seasoned at making an idiot of myself, I readily, even eagerly, agreed. She rowed beautifully, tracking in straight lines and actually covered distance. I paddled furiously in never-ending, over-corrected circles, getting nowhere fast, but oh, I had so much fun! What’s better than being out on the lake, in the sun, with good company? After all, the dizziness passed quickly.

Even though the idea of running a “100-miler”, heck a 10k, is daunting, and I’m not sure I want to backpack and be grubby for more than a night or two, and really scaling perpendicular rock or ice walls is, for me, a spectator sport, and if a region or sport has the words “back country” in it, I smile politely and ask to see photos, living in Gunnison has changed me. Over the years, my husband and I have collected a couple pairs of cross-country skis, slightly upgraded our bikes, and now are the proud owners of a small pile of worn out running and hiking shoes. We can even nonchalantly say we’ve climbed “14ers” and actually know what that means. This year we’ve been saving to buy our own kayaks and hopefully can add this to our list of summer hobbies. Still, I hold no illusions; I will never be as fit or adventurous as those I admire here—I’m too content with moderation. And my toys probably won’t be as cool—at least not as long as I have children who insist on being clothed and fed—but as the saying goes, “I’ve come a long way, baby”.

So Gunnison, thank you. Thank you for a little less muffin top, a little more muscle tone, a healthier blood pressure and a better heart rate. Thank you for introducing us to a new and healthier lifestyle and a different definition of “fun”.

Now, about all this organic eating.... ■

Valley Girl

By Barbara Haas

My first day in Gunnison was a cold winter day
Of unbelievable temperatures.
I was perplexed: "Who would ever live here?"

Like TV scenes in my childhood favorites,
"The Lone Ranger," "Sky King,"
The sagebrush hills were stark, brown, and dry
Bringing doubts about my move from Southern Cal
Yet, encouraging my budding cowgirl spirit
And the anticipation of adventure.

Like one adventure leads to another in childhood,
Highway 135 beckoned me on
Enticing me to days of hiking and skiing
Enriching my wanderlust ways
And the beauty of each season.

Like the bike rides on brick streets 50 years ago,
Hartman Rocks endeared me to the area.
Finding scarlet *cowboy's delight* and ivory-colored yucca

Blooming bright while still riding a bike,
I just switched sidewalks for slickrock.

Like Girl Scout badges earned and treasured,
The Gunnison River prepped me for the
Grand's roaring rapids
Opening to new perspectives with each river
Inspiring me to sleep under the moon and stars
With a sense of familiarity . . . of home.

Like the ocean waves of my "Surfin' USA" era teens,
Blue Mesa captured my heart with speed skating.
Now experiencing new dimensions of water
Fulfilling desires deep in my soul
And the joy of being alive.

Today I sit on a snowy spring day
Accepting unpredictable temperatures.
Now I understand: "How could I leave here?"



Painting by Judy Cox

Rafting

By Derek Ketcham

The cool water feels nice in the hot air.
The camping is amusing
And the nature is vivid.
I can't wait to raft again!



Photo by John Nelson

Freedom

By Wendy Beukelman

Sting my face with snow
Scorch it with the sun
Steal my breath with the wind

Trap me in a lightning storm
Paralyze me in shrouds of fog
Blind me with sunshine brilliance

Soak me in sheets of rain
Batter me with icy hail
Grip me in the subzero clench

Cover me in an avalanche
Trap me, trembling, on a cliff's edge
See me fall, tumbling until I bleed

But at least it was not you

My Prayer

By Linda Nienhueser

They tell me I'm blessed –
But how can that be?

I still ask God to watch over my daughter –
Only now I add
And honey, please watch over me.

Rafting

By Katherine Ketcham

A slight breeze teases my hair from a braid.
Splash!
The hot air compels me to jump in the cool water.
Fish tickle my feet as I swim alongside the raft.
Look!
A wave splashes me in the face.
A pure sound echoes in the air as I laugh for joy.
I love to raft!

Young in the Mountains

By Mary Dillon

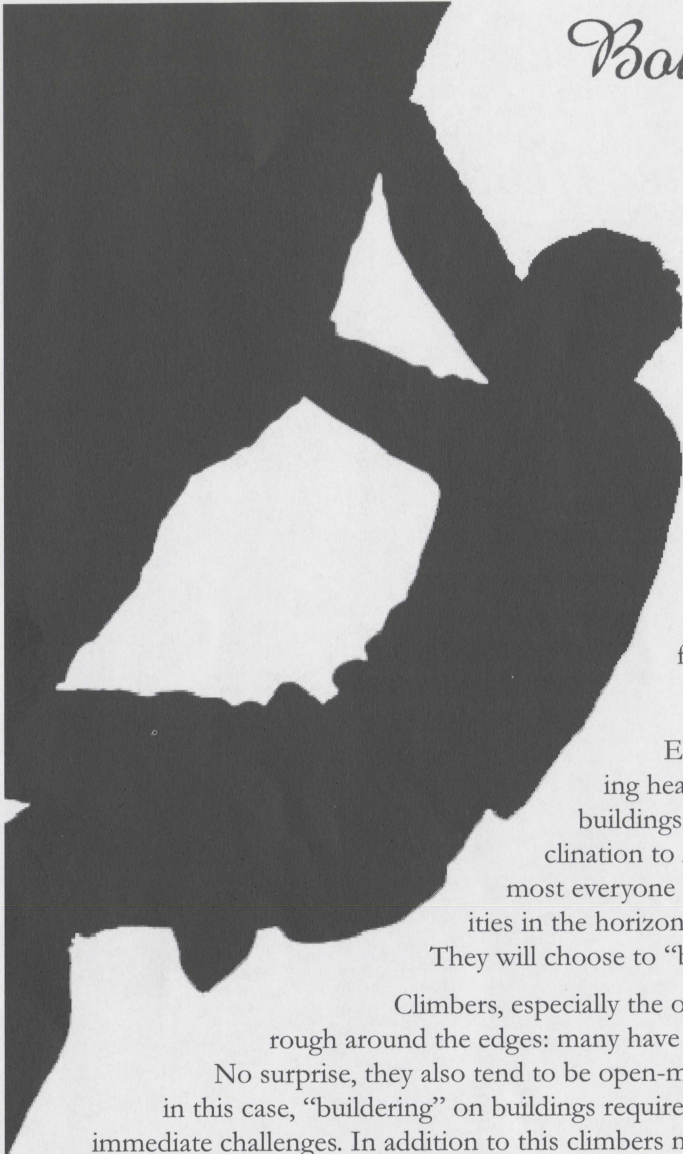
When I was young in the mountains, I loved to hike.
Every summer I would hike to lakes, so I could swim and sunbathe,
and to forests, where I would peacefully rest in the shadowy silence of the grove of trees.
I treasured the sound of the sweetest chirp of the beautiful bird soaring in a clear blue sky,
the munch of the furry bown chipmunk, hastily eating its nut,
and the scuttle of the big, fat, marmot clearing the rocks one by one
to get home to its family.

Joy

By David J. Rothman

He died two years ago, at seventeen,
My sweet-willed student, rising freeski star.
He'd always landed switch-540s clean
But went too big this time and spun too far.
In college now, she babysits my boys.
The plastic band that bears his name is blue,
Hard evidence she's learned what time destroys.
I ask. "Just friends," she says. I sense it's true.
A pause. "But he did...Here." Out on the stairs,
She looks me in the eye. Words overflow...
"...they did it on my couch." Cute friend of theirs.
A wistful smile..."I thought you'd want to know."
O you funny, lanky, long-haired boisterous boy –
You've made me laugh again. And yes, they're tears of joy.

Photo by Robert Valdez



Bouldering in the Gunnison night

Story & Photo by Luke Mehall

In the deep of the night it happens. Buzzed on something, spirits, smoke, a change occurs, an athletic alchemy, different urges when some of the chances and opportunities of the night have passed. The possibility of getting laid is gone but there is still a desire to experience more. The bartender tells everyone to leave, everyone stumbles out onto the streets, some think about a late-night DVD, maybe the twelve pack of PBR in the fridge at home.

Others think about climbing buildings.

Enter the mind and body of a climber; enter their thumping heart and pumping blood. Look through their eyes at the buildings with a desire that no one but a climber could feel, an inclination to interact with them, to enter a different dimension. When most everyone has entered the dream world of sleep, or other lazy activities in the horizontal, just two or three may decide to enter the vertical. They will choose to "builder."

Climbers, especially the ones that are in their young twenties, are scruffy and rough around the edges: many have un-kept beards, pants and clothes with holes in them.

No surprise, they also tend to be open-minded. Climbing mountains, "bouldering" on rocks, and in this case, "buildering" on buildings requires a free mind that can come up with creative solutions to immediate challenges. In addition to this climbers must create a sense of believing, willing the body through dangerous and improbable situations. Give climbers a little booze and this open mindedness can get them into trouble. Like that night, where minds were altered by some additional things.

I don't know if Dane builders much these days, but he did then, and during a winter night in Gunnison he had one of those mystical magical buildering moments. It was one of those night when the snow was falling like it's supposed to in the mountains, maybe an inch an hour accumulating on rooftops, streets and sidewalks, spirits were flowing and no one could come up with a reason why we shouldn't go buildering.

So after Dane had had a few drinks at the bar, and walked a mile across town in six inches of snow he was ready for anything. That *anything* he was ready for led us to the entrance of the sketchiest bar in town, the 'Mo, a place with a constant haze of cigarette smoke hanging over the pool tables and patrons. Outside was a large 30-foot vertical sign that read P I Z Z A, which probably confused some tourists each year who walk into the place and find no pizza, just second hand smoke, beer and a handful of souls there to escape whatever it was that led them to the 'Mo. Leading up to the infamous, out of place pizza sign is a difficult buildering route, which caught the attention of our group.

The lower part of the building is what appeared to be some average masonry, big stones a foot tall and two feet wide cemented into the wall, protruding out a couple inches so that they make great climbing holds. These perfect holds lead up to a wooden shingled roof, slightly angled and this night covered in ten inches of snow. Just a foot right of the route was the entrance to the bar.

Continued on following page

Elk Hunting

By Katherine Ketcham

Elk Hunting I

All is dark and gloomy,
When a bird chirps.
The sun has risen.
Snow folds the land like a blanket of
white.
When suddenly a bugle is heard.
I walk toward the sound in a trance,
Here the elk are.

II

As I walk,
The snow crunches.
The air is cool
And the dark timber surrounds me.
I walk on.
Hark!
The sound of a bugle!
I walk quickly and quietly.
My journey is almost finished.

A Wish at Christmas

By Marlene Wright Zanetell

May the bright star that pierces dark
Ever shine on you;
May hope and love be sheltering pines
Ever green for you;
May the quiet peace of falling snow
Ever new, abide with you;
May the river of joy run on
Ever free and murmur to you;
May the massive mountain that is truth
Ever brave, always arise in you.

Bouldering

Continued from previous page

Now two or three of us had got to this point before Dane and found the move too precarious and difficult to attempt. The move wasn't very dangerous, only eight feet off the ground, so a fall was relatively safe, especially with five spotters below, with their hands up, ready to protect the climber from hurting himself.

Dane was on fire and you could see it in his eyes, and feel it in the energy that surrounded him. After an unsuccessful attempt he was about to climb back onto the bar when a bouncer poked his head out, eyes glazed over from a night of complimentary shift drinks. He looked at Dane with one of those what-the-hell-are-you-doing looks. He quickly acted like he was just checking out the well-done masonry work. The bouncer went back inside confused.

Dane immediately got back on the wall and in thirty

seconds reached the nearly horizontal roof. This move was the crux, the most difficult building sequence that had been attempted all night. Like a karate master he swung his foot above his head off to his right and planted it into the snow on the roof. As he dug his foot into the snow a couple, arm in arm, stumbled out of the bar. Their expression quickly turned from intoxicated lust to amazement and terror as they looked up to see Dane rocking his foot onto the snow-covered roof, pushing his hands down and moving onto the roof.

Dane conquered the Mo'.

There were summertime building sessions too, which everyone made it through without serious injuries. Building is very risky, but it is also an expression. A manifestation of energies in the night, not ready for the night to end; determined to live more, to transform. ■

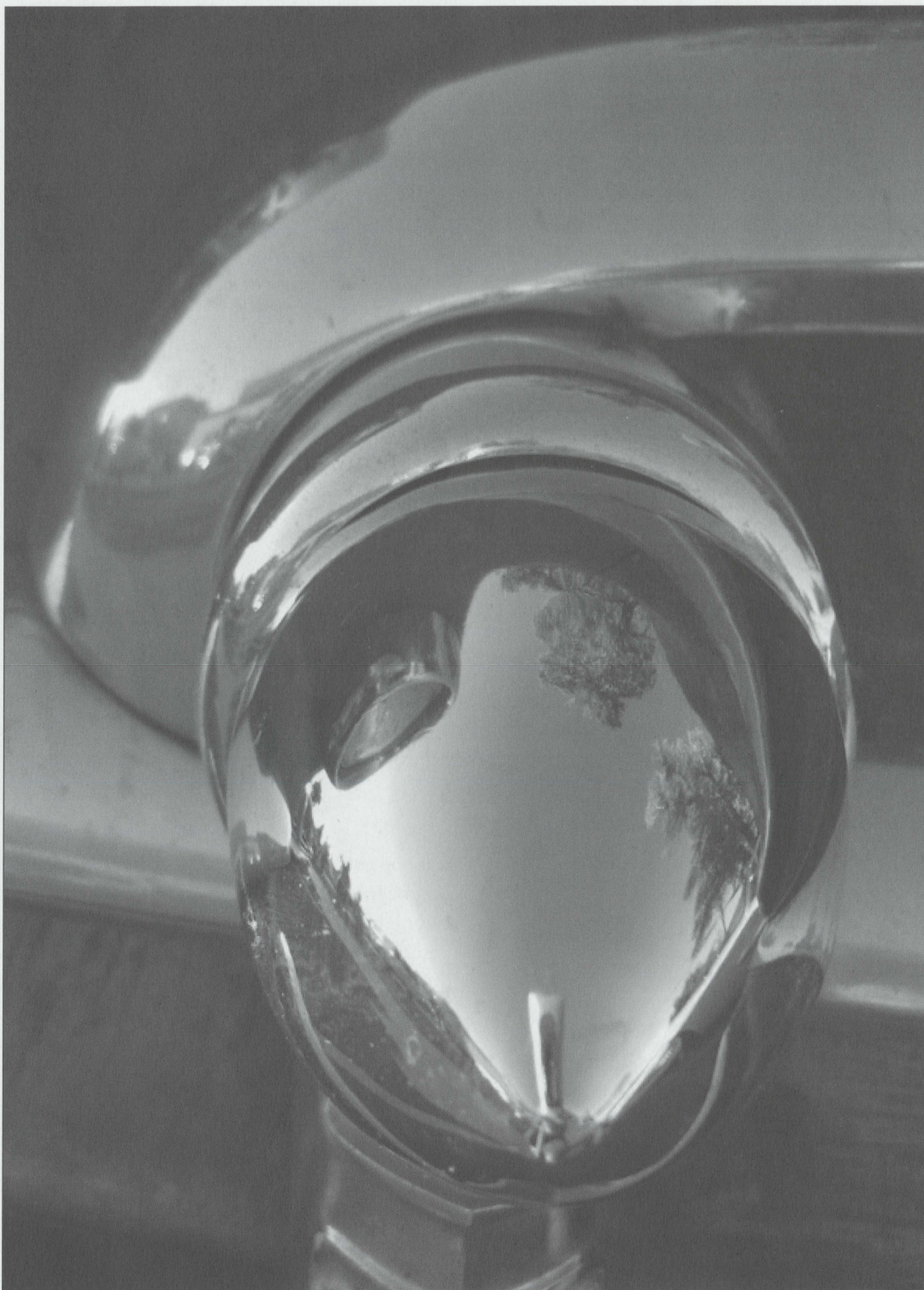


Photo by Matt Burt

Simple Works

By David Pinkerton

I dug at another rat's nest of gossamer thin fishing line hopelessly knotted a foot from the fly. My client's first cast after lunch wasn't much different than his other attempts. Maybe I was losing my touch. Or maybe I had to admit this guy wasn't ever going to cast a fly, much less catch a fish. But *why* was the question. And I had better find the answer soon, if he was going to get what he wanted.

What he wanted became pretty clear to me by mid morning. I was retying after Eddie had another back cast like a lion tamer, snapping off fly number nine in a telling whip-crack. He sat in the bow of my cataraft, staring unfocused at the water. After a pause, he blurted out, "My wife left me last month." He blinked a three count. "All she said was, 'It's not working, Eddie. You're just too simple—severely simple.'" His shoulders sagged. "Well, simple guys don't fly fish, do they?" Eddie's jaw tightened in determination.

So I figured he wanted the sexy2, attention-getting stuff he'd seen in the movies—long, delicate casts of bushy dry flies to corpulent fish. *That's* not simple. Fortunately, I could eddy out in that soft pool where Tomichi Creek joins the Gunnison and work on his tangle. Puffy clouds broke July sun; a yellow warbler ambushed bugs in the willows; caddis flies crawled along the rim of my sunglasses.

With a new fly and stronger line, we shoved off. But I worried. Eddie's hang-dog look broadcast a building lack of confidence. Was this yet another episode in the serial disappointment his life had become? He needed something new and exciting to dislodge the boring equilibrium his wife complained about. He needed to catch a fish.

"Wait more time on your back cast", I reminded him, my voice a few decibels louder than it needed to be. His success was my success; his failure, my failure. Simple, right?

Eddie jerked his rod in reverse until its tip thumped my right pontoon. Floating line lofted skyward, then piled on the water just long enough for his fly to snag on the nub of a submerged log. I knew what was coming next. And I knew I couldn't stop it.

In a natural motion, Eddie cocked his arm and threw. The rod tip sizzled. Line lifted off the water, taking up slack like it was the burning fuse on a stick of dynamite. Except that the only explosion was the sickening crack of monofilament bursting from the fly.

"What did I do wrong?" Eddie pleaded. "I did what you said." His chest deflated; he slumped in his seat, letting the

flyless line dangle aimlessly. Then he turned to me and said, "I guess she was right." His head dropped slightly. "It looks like fly fishing isn't simple enough for me."

That got my attention. What's wrong with simple, I thought. If that's what this man was, then I ought to be able to find a way to make it work. Who said catching fish like an expert is the best? Maybe just catching fish is enough? Maybe it's that simple.

Finally, I had an idea. I had seen Eddie handle himself in the boat all day. He was steady on his feet, balanced and adaptable. Ups and downs in rapids didn't bother him and he rode the waves as if they were part of everyday life. Yet when he cast, I could see his lips moving. It looked like he was trying to convince himself of something. And that something wasn't natural. It made him over-think.

I pulled in behind a large streamside boulder and shipped my oars. We were shallow enough for me to reach over and grab a handful of walnut-sized pebbles. I handed Eddie a stone and told him to give me the rod. His eyebrows pinched together, but he did what I said.

"See that rock ten yards upstream, the one with the scooped flank?" I asked, using the rod as a pointer. The boat held steady in the slack water.

Eddie looked upstream and nodded.

"Hit that soft water two feet behind it." I held the remaining rocks in reserve.

With a quizzical look, Eddie weighed the stone in his hand. Then he squared up, took aim, and threw. A big splash erupted exactly where I had pointed. I was onto something. So I gave him three other throwing rocks, pointed out targets at various ranges, and said, "Now just hit each of those spots as fast as you can. Don't think about it. Just throw."

With no flashy wind up or noticeable aim, Eddie hit the bull's-eye all three times! He turned to me and wiped his hands. "Throwing rocks is simple. I don't want simple." He glared at me. "I want to be like everybody else."

"You'll be better than everyone else," I said, my hands probing for a fly box. "You'll be yourself." Then I found Eddie's leader at the end of his floating line, cut off all but the last four feet, and tied on a size eight, rubber-leg wooly bugger—a fat and heavy fly that imitates a bait fish. Eddie was going streamer fishing!

I handed him the rod and pulled out enough line for him

Continued on following page

The Mean Season

By Sherrill Stenson

The snow weights down some brave daffodils
That had to know that winter was not yet over
I shake my head in disapproval
Not so much of the daffodils
But of the sorry state they are in
I wonder if they will be strong enough to stand again.

Simple Works

Continued from previous page

to hold the fly in his throwing hand. In a natural reflex, he bounced the heavy fly in his palm. His eyes squinted. "Now hit those same spots. This time, use your rod to throw the fly." I lifted the cork handle so he could reach it easily. "Don't think. Just throw."

Eddie eyed the first target, gauged the distance, and stripped out just enough line. Then in a single fluid stroke, he whipped the rod once causing his fly to rocket forward. Ker-plop! Right on target. He turned to me, eyes round. I nodded at the other two targets. In rapid succession, he hit them both. When he rotated back in my direction, a grin lifted his cheeks. "That was simple," he said.

I tried not to match his grin. We weren't done. And there was only an hour left in the float. Finding what was simple for Eddie was one thing. Making it work was another. So I showed him how to strip line once the streamer had hit the intended location. He adapted quickly.

We pulled into the current and Eddie began slapping the streamer into every pocket of soft water he saw. On his fifth cast, a fat brown trout surged from the bottom and slammed his fly. Instinctively, he seemed to know what to do—keep the tip up, the line tight, and reel when you could. Soon, a 17-inch trout flopped in our net. We released that one, then Eddie boated four more nice fish in a frenzy of simple joy.

"The deck hole is coming up," I announced after watching the last fish dart away. "Lots of big fish live there. See if you can get one."

Eddie inhaled until his vest pockets bulged, then let air out slowly though his nose. "Do I need to do anything different?" he asked.

I shook my head, bumped the oars slightly, and tilted my

chin river right. "Throw just below that swirl. Let's see what Mr. Simple can do."

With that, Eddie pitched a strike. Then instantly, wham! A wide red stripe slashed at the streamer. "Set!" I yelled. The sound of a cannon ball dropped in water reached my ears.

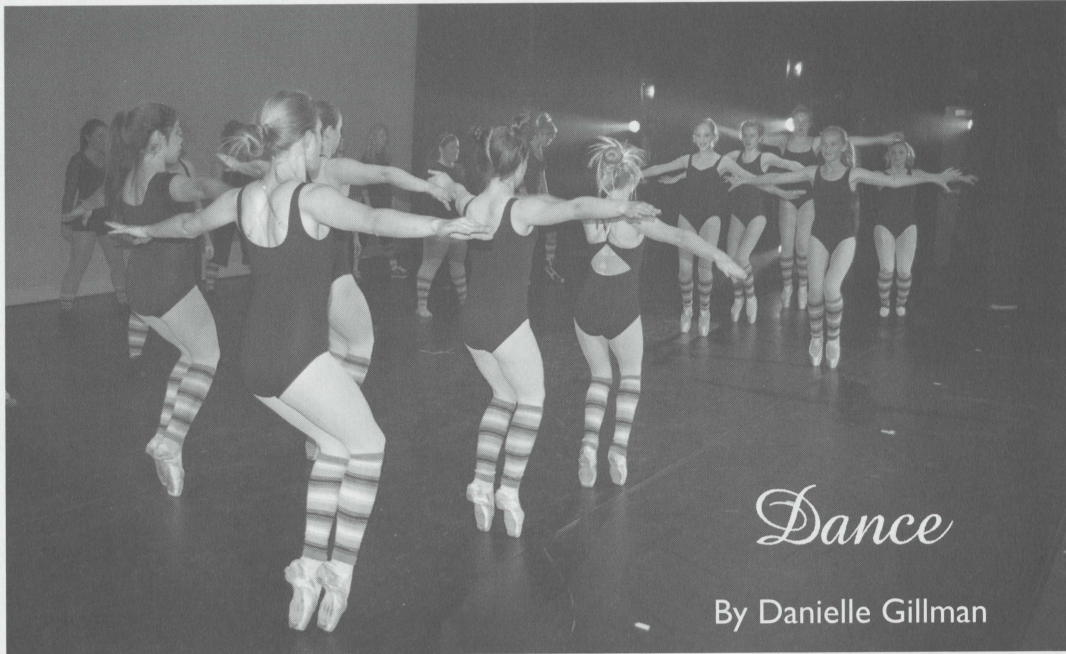
Line screamed from his reel. Eddie's rod bent like a shepherd's staff. I caught a glimpse of the fish as it swam by the boat, fleeing downstream. It was big—very big. I rowed forward with all my strength so Eddie would have a chance, but I could already see the orange color of his backing. This wasn't going to be easy.

But the fish turned and we closed the distance. Eddie's hand spun the reel like an egg beater. A hundred yards later, he had the fish's nose above water. The big rainbow thrashed one last time, pirouetting in a dance of survival. I lunged forward with the net and bumped the fish. And just like that Eddy's line went slack and his fly went sailing past my ear. The rainbow's broad tail slapped water into my face. Eddie turned to me, speechless.

"I'm sorry, Eddie," I said, hanging my head. "I blew it. It's that simple."

I had just enough river remaining to ferry us to the take out. Once there, Eddie helped me load my boat and secure the lashings. We worked in silence for several minutes. When we were about to part, Eddie offered his hand. We shook firmly. I still felt bad. I'm sure he could sense it. Eddie relaxed. A genuine smile brightened his face.

"I've learned something," he said, lifting one hand and placing it on my shoulder. "Maybe she was wrong. Maybe simple works just fine." ■



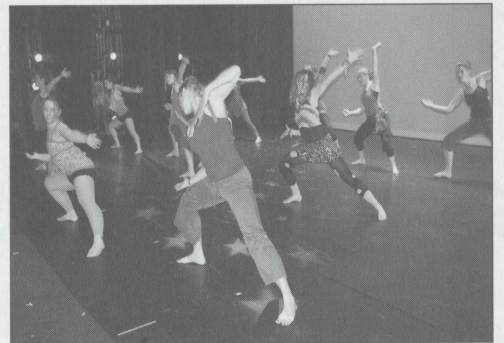
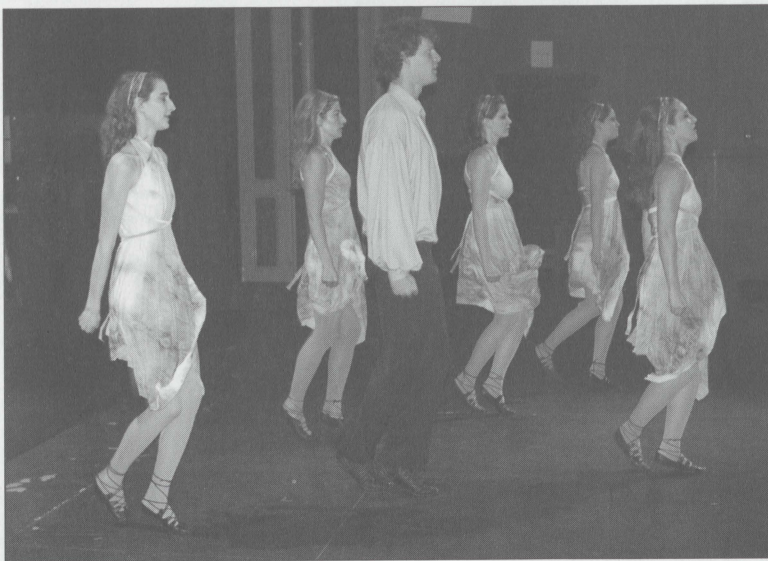
Dance

By Danielle Gillman



The music vibrates onto the empty stage,
I'm lost in a state of pure ecstasy.
I am no longer trapped in this black cage.
My stomach goes unbearably queasy,
But as I step onto this fresh heaven
My fear vanishes and I am free at last.
There are seven fears, exactly seven,
But none of them disorder or harass.
I can move my body freely today.
Neither the past nor the future matter.
I have no possible cause to dismay.
I allow the lights to perhaps flatter.
All that matters is me and my passion
This is intense, pure love and compassion.

Photos by Jan Badgley



Orsch Poetry

The One-Room School - Orsch - is a school for the valley's young people 4-year-old through eighth grade, organized by Jackie Burt with learning orchestrated by her, the parents and friends of creative education around the valley. Shelley Read worked with the students to create this poetry.

Love

By Taylor Barnes

Love is the first kiss.
The first kiss is like the
red heart beating.
The heart beating is like
your wondrous life.
Your life is the inspiration.
Your inspiration is the courage.
Courage is the flower popping out of the
ground, feeling like the sun is
offering a kiss.
Love is the first kiss.

Bald Eagle

By Madeline Redden

I see in the distance,
a majestic, flaunting beast.
What can it be?
A bald eagle,
Swooping down,
Swiftly.
She skims the water,
then up to her nest she flies,
a fish in her beak.
Dinner.

The Miracle of Spring

By Natish Cowger

As the seasons change,
I slowly wait for the miracle of spring to happen.
The miracle of spring starts with the tiny saplings
eager to burst out and become just like their brothers and sisters.
As I walk through the green and yellow grass,
I feel the wind blow gently on my face
like the breath of some sort of animal.
I hear the birds singing, some softly, some loudly,
some sound like a squeaky cabinet.
The birds soar across the sky, taking their song as they go.
The leaves crumble beneath my feet with every step I take.
I kneel down and touch the grass, prickly like a porcupine.
I feel the bumpy bark on the trees.
Looking up, the pine tree looks like a giant web.
The cotton ball clouds slowly move across the blue sky.
The fresh smell of the rain surrounds me.
The miracle of spring has finally happened.

After a Spring Snow

By Emma Burt

It is snowing today,
big, fat flakes.
But it is warm, wet snow
so it won't last.

I go outside
and look around,
up, down, and on the ground.
The ground is muddy.
The wind is brisk.
A bare tree shivers,
another quivers.

I walk up to an old cottonwood tree,
feeling the ancient bark,
wondering its story.
The bark paints my fingers
a dusty white,
nature's paint.

The bluebird chirps high above me
like a squeaky playground swing.
Everything is alive!
Even the baby weeds push through the soil,
for life,
for light,
for love.

Mountain Lion

By Tabor Dussault

You leap fast like lightning,
your claws stab like knives,
your eyes are like lasers,
your run drums on the rocks,
you swerve through the trees like a slippery
snake,
your roar is as loud as thunder.
You are the king of the forest.

I Am Nature

By Sophie Hoffman

As wild as the horses run,
as strong as the flowers bloom,
I am nature.
I am part of you.
I am the wind that flows through the flag
and cracks like a whip.
I make the snow come down low in the winter.
I make the rain fall in the spring.
I make the power of the sun rain down in the
summer.
I am the eagle that soars through the blue sky.
I am the flowers that the bees drink
sweet,
sunny
syrup
from in the summer.
I am nature.

My Beautiful Wildflower

By Megan Jenkins

You spread your color across the rolling hills of lush grass,
making details of miniscule size.
Even the butterflies drop to your art.
Your canvas is such a masterpiece.
How do you pick such lively colors
when the sky is so dimly lit?
You paint the meadows
violet, indigo, and emerald,
so magnificent as the sun replenishes
your color.
You are as gifted as Leonardo Da Vinci,
my beautiful wildflower.

The Wind

By Sam Burt

I am what drives the soccer player crazy,
I am what makes the athlete feel lazy,
I am what moves the seeds to be planted,
I am what makes the rain fall slanted,
I am what blows around the papers,
I am the powerful wind of nature.

Naturalist

By Kim Eastman

Yes, I am a naturalist of sorts
In the sense I like nature
I like to walk along a wooded path
and listen to the trees whisper of the past
When Indians walked with tender care
through these very woods
to hunt the deer
For need though and not because the hunt was a sport
I like to walk alongside a babbling stream
Though if you listen very close
the stream is not babbling at all
It is telling a beautiful tale of life renewed as spring thaws
winter's icy grip
It is telling its life story of traveling to the sea
to be reincarnated as a rain drop you see
And so the circle of life goes on
I follow the stream to the river's edge
and listen to the river's story
of life at its very core
without water there is only death
So yes, I am a naturalist of sorts
In the sense that nature gives me MY life

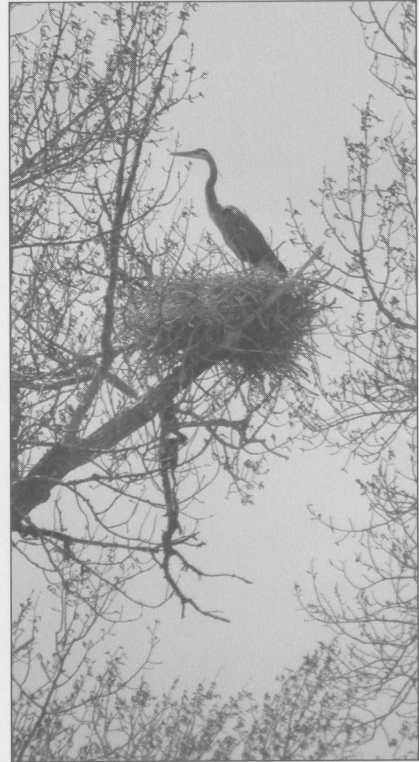


Photo by Jan Badgley



Photo by John Nelson



Photo by Greg Morin

Does the East River care if it doesn't get to the ocean?

By George Sibley

Every so often we see or experience something that so startles or stuns us that it begins to change the way we think about that thing, and maybe about life in general.

One such experience for me was looking down on the East River meanders for the first time, from up on the ridge between Crested Butte Mountain and Snodgrass Hill. That was more than 40 years ago, but I have never forgotten the moment. I'd bicycled up from town one June day, and came to that curve in the Gothic Road where everything just drops off, and found myself looking 500 feet down into the East River valley, at a watercourse I could only think at first was "lost." A lost river wandering around in loops and bends on a flat, brushy, marshy valley floor, often almost doubling back to where it had just been, a lost river trying to remember which way was downhill.

But it was so startlingly beautiful that my second thought was – maybe it's not lost at all; maybe it's just *dawdling* – yes, the river was dawdling, loafing, goofing around – acting like maybe it just didn't want to leave. And who could blame it, on such a day, in such a place?

But a question also slipped into my mind: what is this water *doing*?

We all know that water flows downhill, obeying gravity like we all do: because it's the law. But what kind of a flow is a river? I'd always thought of a river, when I thought about it at all, as a kind of natural storm sewer: more water

falls on the land than the land can absorb, and the river carries off the excess, eventually to the oceans. "The rivers all flow to the sea," said the Ecclesiastical Preacher, and it has become conventional wisdom that rivers *ought* to flow to the sea. It is, for example, considered a bad thing that the East River – as part of the larger Colorado River basin – no longer flows to the sea.

But the river that had stopped me that day, to look at it – and I have stopped and looked at it many times since – did not look like a river eager to get to the sea. It did not at all demonstrate the kind of efficiency that engineers design into effective storm sewers or other forms of plumbing.

So I have been rethinking rivers, and the movement of water in general. I've been upstream of those meanders, and watched the river and its tributaries at work in the mountains. When rain falls or snow melts, its first inclination is to sink into the ground. But when there is too much water to all sink in, the rest of it begins ripping and tearing at the mountain slopes down which it comes bouncing and jostling. But I began to wonder: is the stream really trying to rip up the mountainside – or is it just doing what I would be doing if I were falling down a mountainside, grabbing at everything to try to find something to hang onto to break my fall?

That question might be answered when the stream

Continued on following page

reaches a place where its geology allows it to slow down a little. As soon as the water can slow down, it begins to drop all the debris it has picked up and carried or rolled along – drops it right in its own path, so that eventually it has to start moving around its own debris, and it begins to form a floodplain through and across which it meanders, like the East River below the Gothic Road.

So it occurred to me that a river allowed to seek its own course will do what it can to alter geography in ways that *deter* it from leaving the land. All rivers might flow into the sea, but there's evidence in the way they work, that they are in no hurry to do so, and maybe would even rather not.

Building a floodplain to meander through is a relatively simple strategy for water thwarting gravity and staying with the land. Water's more complex strategy for staying with the land is life itself. From an elemental perspective, all land-based biological life could be defined as a highly diversified joint strategy between water and earth, to keep water on or in the land. Life, from this elemental perspective, is just a stacking up and connecting of small cellular water vessels, each filled with a soup of water and dissolved earth-elements; without the water, those cells are without life; add water and life stirs.

So all biological life, in this sense, is a way for water to push back against the pull of gravity – through plants, water in its cellular vessels actually thrusts itself up directly against gravity, to heights of as much as three hundred feet in the greatest trees. And in its animal forms, water moves all around the landscape, uphill as well as down, or just stubbornly staying in place. Beavers build dams to back up shallow ponds that gradually fill in with sediment and plant decay, creating rich soggy meadows marrying water and land.

We ourselves are water that has figured out how to stand

up and look around, think and dream. A Gunnison Basin rancher told me his dream was to turn his "watershed" into a "catchment basin" – from a place that sheds water to a place where all the water that came into it would stay forever.

That's unrealistic of course – even unfair to everyone downstream – but when I look at the rich green fields in our floodplain valleys, where ranchers have further slowed the water's passage by diverting it out of the streams to make more plant life, I can't think they are doing anything the water wouldn't want them to do (although leaving some in the streams for the fish would be generous, in the way that water is generous).

The more I think about it, the more I wonder if the ocean isn't to water what death is to the life that water creates. A kind of a waiting room, where the water waits to be sucked up again into the sky under the power of the sun, to maybe fall again on the land, and again begin its life-giving journey that might end in a plant, or an animal that eats a plant, or an animal that eats the animal that eats the plant, or it might get transpired back up under the sun to fall again – or if all else fails, it will get carried down to the ocean, the final waiting room to start again. Look at the deltas rivers build, pushing whatever they can out into the sea to create there a final great efflorescence of life before the inevitable sink into the sea.

But that's a long way from the East River meanders, and as water organized to think and dream, I'm content to stay here with the water that raised me (or at least my awareness of it), and I recommend more riparian loafing (or fishing, for the habitually industrious) by moving waters that are trying not to move through too fast; learn what's there to be learned, or at least nap and dream. ■



Photo by Robert Valdez

Flat Light

By Jackie Devore

In these last days of winter, disquiet appears
...as if there is something left to do
...things unsaid, truths untold
...words that need to speak out
...thoughts that need to wake up
But, like whispers from another room, muted and soft
Bits and pieces only prickle against the numbness
... like a foot fallen asleep

Outside the window, insipid snows and flat light frame the world
in two-dimensional time and space.
Inside the room, the cat pushes his soft face into my outstretched hand
looking at me with inquisitive eyes.
He, like me, is remembering more cheerful days.

I am grown weary of this tedious plane of light
...a light that covers everything with a strange brightness
...a brightness that casts no shadow
Invisible in this winter place, I strain to feel something real and true
...even as my eyes push back against the dullness of flat light

In flat light, there is an uncanny sense of vertigo,
...a dizzying feeling of moving forward while standing still
Phantom limbs have invented themselves from parts cut away
...sensing movement along lost paths that might have been

In this place where flattened judgment lives,
there is no depth...
there is no color...
there is no justice...
Only mirrored reflection showing pale fragments of kinder seasons...

Old wood that will not burn lies charred in the fireplace
...the flames have grown dark and smoky.
I stir the blackened coals with the determination of an iron poker
...trying to bring brightness back to the fire but my efforts gain only
...a brief shower of orange sparks before they dim and settle back into
...the flat smoldering flames of habit

After days and days of flat light,
I am mad for yellow stars and blue sky
...struggling against the blandness
...remembering that struggle is where the magic lies.
Knowing the magic is still there,
...even as it is kept dry-pressed between the faded, fragile pages of what remains.

Continued on following page

Flat Light

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Once more, an urgency for color...especially yellow.
One day, long ago, my mother planted a lemon tree in her
back yard
Its soft white flowers sent a perfumed sweetness through
the quiet desert nights
My longing reaches out to pick bowlfuls of fresh yellow
lemons
dozens of bright yellow lemons with green oily leaves step
out of time and fill the room with their fragrant color

Just the hint of lemons squeezes juicy life into my
thoughts,
...and grates sun-filled zest across these winter days
Veritable lemons pungent and true in themselves
...undefined by sour judgments made in flat light

I smile and imagine lemon light
...gossamer threads of lemon light
spinning from the bellies of ceiling spiders now
dropping down on single lines of yellow light to
... trap my grey reflections
...wrap them inside of small silken bundles
...and store them away as
...food for thoughts that need digesting.

Often these days,
I feel like
...cleaning,
...polishing,
...sweeping,
...scrubbing,
...dusting
...and shining
every surface I can find.
All is covered with this residue of dusty light...
Ashes of roses sacrificed for love so long ago.

Emptying the ashes releases a filmy haze that floats up like
smoke and curls backward
...like spirits of dead things that refuse to move on
...like seasons that refuse to change
...like tongues speaking lies that won't let go
...like habits of the heart that hold to small, bright hopes.



Photo by Robert Valdez

I am cleaning away ghost dust...
...sweeping,
...wiping
...polishing
...shaking away ghost dust

All the while,
patient spiders watch and wait for a chance to spin their
playful dreams
...dreams that let us sail across the world on hopeful
strands of lemon light
...piercing the gloom together
...and weaving the radiant fertility of stars into this flat
light day.

Gunnison Hosts The Gunfighters Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday

By Judy Buffington Sammons

Most people don't realize just how much time Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday, the famous gun fighters, spent in Colorado. When hearing those well-known names, they usually think of Arizona and New Mexico. But the two men did spend a considerable time in Colorado and especially on the Western Slope. Earp and Holliday arrived in the fledgling town of Gunnison in 1882, not long after the famed "gunfight at the O.K. Corral." Gunnison was booming at this time and they found a pretty lively place. Accounts vary as to when they each arrived and how long they stayed, but Gunnison's old-timers claimed that indeed the town briefly hosted two of the West's most famous gunfighters.

Upon reaching Gunnison, Wyatt Earp and a few of his companions camped on the outskirts of town about two miles west along the Gunnison River. Doc Holliday may have been part of this group or he may have arrived later. The local newspapers noted the Earp party's arrival, stating that they looked prosperous, appeared well-armed, and owned a good camp outfit and a handsome team of mules.

Gunnison was a typical boom town at this time – rough and primitive, but beginning to show some of the signs of the arrival of civilization. Newspapers had been established and a crude water supply coursed through ditches that had been dug down either side of a wide main street. The county courthouse was under construction, and there were numerous boarding houses, restaurants, and log buildings, as well as many residential tents. A bank had been opened, a killing or two had taken place, and more than one sermon had been preached. However, while plans were underway for building schools and churches, saloons and gambling houses were being built much faster. Among the town's citizens were numerous card sharks and dance hall girls. Special red light districts thrived in the new town and, according to some historians, so did more than a dozen saloons. Many of these establishments were open all night long, and the liquor flowed freely while gold pieces changed hands across tables. It was as good a place as any for a gunfighter.

By the time Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday arrived in Gunnison, they had each earned their membership in a

very select group – they were both among the top ten gunfighters in the West. Living legends – their reputations preceded them. Many of the celebrated gunmen of that day had at one time or another served as peace officers, often combining this occupation with the more lucrative one of gambler. Wyatt and Doc had served in these dual roles and, in so doing, both had honed to a fine edge the skill of the quick draw. Quite proficient in executing their duty as a lawman or a killer, they could perform their job with a steady hand and a cool demeanor. It was said that either of them could remove their Colt .45 from its holster in a split second and lay an opponent out dead on the floor.

The Earp party, camping by the Gunnison River, reportedly remained to themselves initially, only rarely going into town for supplies. It was rumored they were "lying low" until some of the Tombstone "trouble" had blown over. Eventually though, Wyatt relocated to Gunnison, where he operated a gambling house and saloon, running a faro game in a ramshackle two-story building on the second block of Main Street. He was a remarkably good looking man – tall, dark-moustached, blue-eyed, and imposing, with a gun holstered high up under each arm. While in Gunnison he likely dressed as other gunfighter/gamblers of the time did, wearing a distinctive black broadcloth suit and immaculate white shirt with a black string tie. An early-day town newspaperman from the *Gunnison Daily News-Democrat* interviewed Wyatt and reported that while he talked freely enough, he was very cautious about what he said. Wyatt stayed in Gunnison for a year or so, with no particular trouble arising, everyone keeping in mind Wyatt's stated philosophy of gun fighting . . . "stay calm, keep your mouth shut and take your time . . . don't figger to pull the trigger but once." According to the newspapers, Earp had offered his services to the local sheriff should the need arise. Apparently it never did.

When Wyatt's friend, Dr. John H. (Doc) Holliday, arrived in town, he also came with a reputation. Doc, a former dentist, was a renowned gunfighter – in fact, he was known as one of the West's deadliest. A thin, light-haired man with cold and expressionless light blue eyes, Doc

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Photo by Linda Nienhueser

The Gunfighters

Continued from previous page

was afraid of nothing. He was reputed to drink heavily and had a reputation for luring unsuspecting adversaries into fights. His uncontrollable temper added to the danger. In general he was not well liked; but he, nevertheless, earned the guarded respect of colleagues and adversaries for his willingness to risk his life for the sake of a friend or a good cause. Doc was a steadfast follower and supporter of Wyatt Earp, and Earp returned this respect. He once stated that his friend Holliday “was the most skillful gambler, the nerviest, fastest, deadliest man with a six-gun I ever saw.” The press noted Doc’s presence in town, as they had Wyatt’s. The *Gunnison Daily News-Democrat* stated that he “was dressed in a dark close fitting suit of black, and wore the latest style of round top hat. His hair was seen to be quite gray, his moustache sandy, and his eyes a piercing blue.”

“I’m glad to see you, Mr. Reporter,” Doc said in the interview, “but I’m not traveling about the country in search of notoriety. . . .” When asked if he’d had some trouble in Tombstone, Doc replied, “You might call it

trouble.”

Other than the brief reports made in the local newspapers, Earp and Holliday seemed to have made little news – certainly no headlines – in the fledgling town of Gunnison. In fact, very little is known of what happened during their stay.

Wyatt Earp moved on, continuing his habit of wandering through the West’s many boomtowns, investing in mines, and running gambling establishments. After he left Gunnison, he worked as a gambler in Trinidad, Silverton, Aspen, and Denver. He lived to be eighty-one years old, his gun fighting days mostly behind him by the time he left Gunnison. Doc Holliday moved on to Silverton and then Leadville, where he shot a man. He also spent time in Denver and Pueblo. He was already ill by the time he resided in Gunnison and died on May 8, 1887, in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, of what was then called “consumption” (tuberculosis). The famous gunslinger was only thirty-six when disease – not a bullet – brought him down. ■

Insights To His Calling

By John Nelson

She asks why it is that I still do it
and expresses her concern and mounting fears.
You know you're not getting any younger.
You've been in this business all of thirty years.

And, as I sit at home alone this evening
and stare out at the winter's white expanse,
I think about this lifestyle that I've chosen
and wonder how and when I'll end this dance.

But tonight, I hear a mule string braying
from a trail where you can almost touch the sky.
I feel the smile building across my sleepy face.
It's hard to face the future, but I try.

I contemplate just how hard it is to make it.
Make it? Hell. We're always lucky just getting by.
Insurance, equipment, vet bills, livestock to be fed,
government paperwork would make a grown man cry.

You know it's hard finding good help these days,
and you'd best be paying dang well if you do.
But, I wish I could pay 'em more. They earn it and
love the life. They're just trying to make it too.

And tonight, I can hear those top hands laughing
as we turn in at the end of a long hard day.
I throw the sticks of firewood out my bed once again.
The stress and worry seems to melt away.

There's a pain when I move wrong in my shoulder.
They fixed my eye, but some things are barely seen.
The wrecks have taken their toll on this ol' melon.
It's been cut more than a pumpkin at Halloween.

The horses and mules seem to be growing taller,
and the uphill when I'm walking runs both ways.
It takes a bit more gruntin', but I still hold my own.
Though in my mind I know, I've seen my better days.

But tonight, I hear a distant bull elk chuckle.
And the passion that I feel, I can't deny.
It's one of those small things that I live for,
like emotions felt when lonesome coyotes cry.

I should listen to the good sense that she's making.
I'm educated. I could get a real job here in town.
I'd work my forty hours. That'd be just half a week.
Perhaps, time has come for me to start slowing down.

I'd sell the business, these damn mules and horses,
Invest in something that has a way of paying back.
Bring my life up to a standard for a new millennium.
Let old ways and friends fall on through the crack.

But tonight, I hear the mountains calling.
In the canyon there's an echo from afar.
And, that voice rings clear to explain my yearning.
This way of life is not what you do. It's what you are.

So perhaps, it's best that I just sleep on this till morning
when my mind is running fully in all gears.
Then treat thoughts of quitting like ol' Rip van Winkle.
And, wake 'em up again in, say, twenty years.



Photo by John Nelson

Cowboy As It Gets

By Brent Winston

Well friends, I've heard it said, cowboys are a dyin' breed
hat wearin heroes from the past are slowly fadin away
True; men of that sort are found few and far between
things are different than they were in the olden days

the wide open spaces ain't so wide and usually aren't open
most great horses are found in the show ring
cowboy dreams are often left unlive and broken
work is tough to find lessen ya wanna ride dude string

true, the times are changin faster than pages in a book
not too many people see cowboys any more
that is unless ya know where ya need to look
they're still out there but in places never been before

sure they still ride the prairies, and the mountain valley land
still donning chaps, hat, and rope
sittin tall in the saddle -n- ridin for the brand
livin a life no one will ever know

Just like the hands I seen the other day
hundreds of 'em, all dressed alike from hat to boots
a look of determination that says they'll stay
long after the bull has left the chutes

they ride for the brand and live by a code that is true
ridin a special type of horses
the brand they ride for is red, white, and blue
I talking about the United States Armed Forces

up at dawn sometimes not sleeping for days
fighting for freedom that we all enjoy
in the face of danger each is never fazed
but when you see them, you wouldn't think cowboy

true most don't chase cattle and ride broncy horses
don't carry rope, chaps, or wear a hat
but they stand for honor and battle against vicious forces
stickin up for those who can't
-n- if you ask me... It don't get no more cowboy than that.

God Bless America



Photo by Judy Cox

Jack

By Jim Greer

In some of my later years as an outfitter and guide in the Gunnison National Forest, I had the honor and pleasure of partnering with a sixteen-hand-high white Appaloosa mule named Jack. Soon after acquiring him we became great friends, and with good judgment and patience, Jack began my training as a man worthy to ride such a noble animal. Though I have ridden countless other mules and horses, there were none I loved any more or better than Jack.

During our adventures together, I credit Jack with saving my life many times, through blizzard, fog, rip-roaring thunderstorms, bog and bone-chilling cold. I also remember our times together in the bluebird and wildflower days of summer. Jack is long gone now and in my old age I no longer ride the high country, but one of my most vivid memories, only because I lived to tell the tale, happened like this.

Many moons ago, Jack and I found ourselves packing in supplies for the third elk season in the Fossil Ridge Wilderness Area. It was bitter cold and the usual watering spring at the trailhead was frozen. There were four of us: Bob, a fellow guide; Jess, the camp cook; and Mike, the camp helper. We packed up fourteen horses and started at noon on our three-hour trip to camp. We pulled into camp in fine style, unloaded and unsaddled the horses and tied them head to tail into two strings.

The plan was that Bob and I would each take a string to water at a lake that was deep enough not to be frozen solid while Jess and Mike put the food and horse feed away. The lake was five miles away so I knew we would be three hours there and back with an additional forty-five minutes

to chop through the ice and water the horses. (The horses had to have water twice a day in order to process their hay and grain; otherwise, they would stop eating or if they did eat without water, they would surely founder and die.)

We would have to ride in the dark most of the way home with no moon. I had done this kind of night riding many times—it was not my favorite thing to do, but with a little snow cover on the ground and a clear night there was usually enough starlight to see parts of the trail. We started for the lake at four in the afternoon with enough light left to chop the hole in the ice and water the stock and, we

hoped, be back in the saddle before full darkness.

Things seldom work out as planned in the high country. When we reached the lake, the ax that was always under a certain log was missing—some low life either had stolen it or put it in another hiding place. While I started to chop the ice with my hunting



knife, Bob searched around the lake for the missing ax. The ice was several inches thicker than I had expected and thirty minutes of chopping with my knife had yet to expose any water. The light was starting to go and a stiff wind was beginning to blow, with clouds covering the last of the sunset. It was, I suspected, going to turn into a long and hard night. Bob called from across the lake, "I found the damn ax; someone used it to chop wood for a campfire and left it against a tree." Names flashed through my mind, there would be a reckoning later, but right then, we had to chop through the ice for the horses. It was full dark by the time the hole was big enough to begin watering the strings. They were water-starved and hard to handle on the slick ice—both Bob and I fell several times trying to restrain the

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Jack

Continued from previous page

horses from stepping into the hole in the ice. Finally, in full darkness without any light because a flashlight would blind the horses, we had the horses again tied in two strings head to tail and began the ride back to camp.

Five minutes into the ride the snow hit hard out of the west—a real blizzard—snow so thick and wind so hard that I could not see the front of Jack's head. The wind was directly into our eyes, and the horses kept trying to turn their faces away from the snow. My string of nine horses stretched out over thirty yards behind me. Bob, I knew, had his riding horse nearly on top of my last horse in line so he could maintain contact with us.

In that wind it was almost impossible to maintain any verbal communication. One false step off the trail around the lake would land us in a frozen bog with tangled tree roots and downed trees. This could have resulted in broken legs for the horses and damaged wranglers.

I thought, 'Things will get worse in awhile...if we make it that far.' The trail ahead ran along a high ridge with a drop-off of several hundred feet to a rock-strewn bottom. In the daylight, this section of trail was very nerve wracking. My mind flooded with questions, 'What should I do: Stop and find a place to tie off in a blinding blizzard without shelter—we will at best suffer frostbite and at worst freeze to death; continue on to a place where Jack loses the trail and risk falling off the mountain to certain death; or dismount and try to lead Jack and the string on foot, and risk being trampled by a runaway string?'

I remembered that horses and mules have better night vision by far than humans do, and I had witnessed Jack sniffing the ground like a bloodhound on prior occasions when we had become, not lost, but slightly 'confused' as to our whereabouts. 'Should I put my trust in my old friend Jack to see us through this impossible night? He had

never let me down, ever!'

The ride went on and on. Jack was moving with great care, slowing from time to time to sniff the ground to locate the trail. All I could do was hang on and try not to freeze to death in the saddle. I worried, 'We had been too long on the trail—surely we should have reached camp by now. Had Jack missed the turn off for camp? Were we headed to the trailhead in Taylor Canyon twelve miles away down some of the roughest country around? We would freeze to death in this forty-mile per hour wind long before we reached the bottom.'

Jack came to a complete halt—there was no sniffing the ground, no moving his head from side to side; he stood rock hard still. 'Were we on the edge of a cliff ready to fall off at the next step?' I carefully eased my cold, aching, stiff body out of the saddle hearing Bob in a far-away voice asking, 'What's up?' 'Don't know, Bob,' I yelled over the wind, 'let me check things out.' I moved carefully in front of Jack into total blackness—one step ahead and something flapping in the wind struck my face—the cook tent.

Jack had come to rest with his head at the cook tent door, a place where the cook would give Jack his favorite treat of oatmeal cookies with raisins. He had brought us home through the worst night of my life. Tears of relief streamed down my face. My heart was a lump in my throat, and I could barely breathe. I gave Jack an unwelcome affectionate big hug.

Bob called 'What is going on?' I shouted back, 'We are home and Jack did it—let me light a lantern. I have to get something from the cook tent.' Bob called again, 'What are you doing?' I answered, 'Looking for oatmeal cookies, and if I can't find any, I'm going to bake some right now.' ■

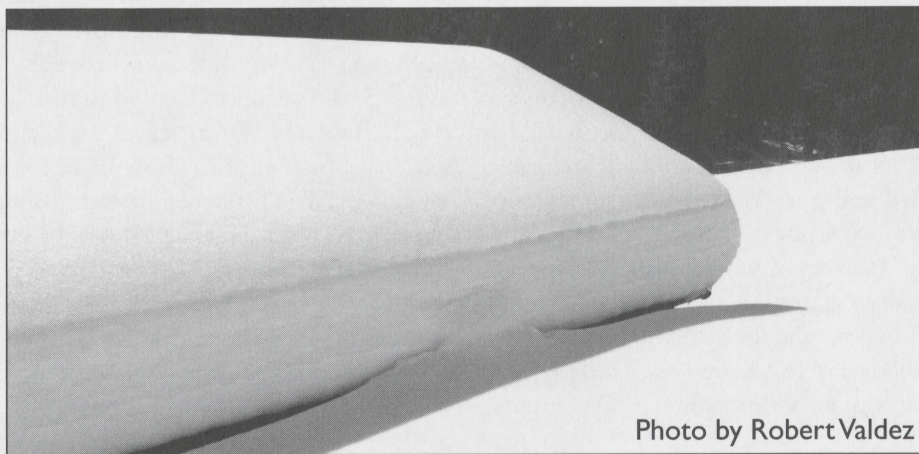


Photo by Robert Valdez

Voices

By Matthew Allison

if you listen closely you can almost hear them
blown into the valley by a burst of wind
before they built the pizza hut and the walmart
before you could drive up and over monarch in an hour
before everybody had a cell phone
or a computer
fifty, one hundred, one thousand years ago
all the men and women who lived here had voices
dreams
emotions
families and friends
they fought against the enemies within themselves
they braved the cold and the snow
they soaked up the sun and savored the water
some were just passing through
others decided to make this place their home
crested butte, gunnison, lake city, pitkin, almont
most of them are gone but their voices linger
like a single raindrop from a swiftly passing cloud
that makes you look up at the sky with bewilderment
what are they saying?
what do they think of the people here now?
what are they trying to tell us?
the voices are there
like a scratchy long distance phone call from far away
swirling around the atmosphere in a great cosmic unison
drawing energy from the sun and the moon
the stars and the clouds
calling out messages to all who remain
i hope they understand



Photo Linda Nienhueser

Nature

By Derek Ketcham

Valley Sounds

By Virginia Jones

Hear ice cracking on Big Blue
The squish of tires on rainy streets

The ping of hail on metal roof
The eerie quiet of snow flakes falling

The sound of jets leaving
The murmur of dove wings in flight

The rattle of dancing aspen leaves
The soothing whispers of the pines

The whoosh of skis on fresh powder
The sounds of birds announcing Spring

And can you say
there is no marching sound
from lines of ants
returning for the night?



Photo by John Nelson

Nothing but silence as I fish for food.
Altitude increases as I hike to the peak.
Time flies by when I rock climb the wormhole.
Ultimate fun is jumping high in the air while on my dirt bike.
Rafting in waves makes you scared but brave.
Every hard sport is caused by courage!

Letting Go

By Judy Cox

My friend is letting go
Of brown spots
In her thinking.

Those little nagging spots
On zucchini
That flew up
To her attention
Blotting out
The brilliant waxy green
By the time
They arrived
As words on her lips
Saying,
"That vegetable
Is not suitable!"

Now
She'd like
To eat her words
And accept the nourishment.

For Judy Pauly

Bringing Sunshine Through Singing

By Luke Mehall

When Bill King's mother suffered a stroke in 2001, conversation became nearly impossible, so they began to communicate through song.

"After my mother's stroke, her speech was heavily affected," King said, "but I realized that she could sing nearly perfectly. So we began to sing together."

King, a professor of English at Western State College, plays the harmonica and guitar.

Later a friend, Andy Keck would come along to the Gunnison Living Community, where she was staying and play his mandolin.

"Then it just started building; more singers and more musicians started joining us," King added. "Now we have a large group called the Sunshine Singers, with a good crowd."

The Sunshine Singers is a collaboration of local musicians who perform every Friday afternoon at the Gunnison Living Community. Anyone is welcome, and the audience consists mostly of residents of the Gunnison Living Community.

King shared that the one common thread in the Sunshine Singers is that many of the musicians have lost loved ones. King's mother, Dorris, died two years ago but the Sunshine Singers still live on.

The group can be large, with sometimes a dozen musicians performing for 30 people. The music is not always polished, but being professional is not the aim of the group.

"It is a mission of love," King said.

Jeanie Woodbury, assessment coordinator at the Gunnison Living Community, has enjoyed watching the Sunshine Singers grow since the beginning. She said that the

group is now an "institution."

"In addition to enjoying the music, it gives residents something to talk about later on," Woodbury said. "They can discuss with others what songs they liked, and what performance they liked. It provides an avenue for conversation."

Jenni Seaman, life enrichment coordinator at the Gunnison Living Community, shared similar thoughts.

"Sunshine Singers has always been the one big event here," she said.

"One of my favorite things is to watch people who can't communicate through speech, but can communicate through music. It's amazing to watch someone who has dementia and can't speak their own name, but can sing all the words to 'You are my Sunshine'."

Music varies with the season. During the holidays they play Christmas music, over St. Patrick's Day they play Irish music. 'You are my Sunshine' is always the first song and 'When the Saints Go Marching Home' is



Photo by Luke Mehall

the closer.

Phoebe Cranor, a local writer and poet who just recently passed on (*see page 3*), was a resident of the Gunnison Living Community who loved the Sunshine Singers, and occasionally she performed a humorous antidote or story herself with the group.

Beyond the music and the laughter, it was the individuals in the Sunshine Singers who kept Phoebe coming back week after week; at one of her last "concerts" listening to the group, she told this reporter that it was "45 minutes of my life that go whizzing by. I like the singing, the camaraderie and how they involve the audience. Everybody likes it. It's just a wonderful experience." ■



Photo Robert Valdez

Glacier Lilies

By Betty Light

Glacier lilies softly sigh,
nestled close to melting snow,
bravely lifting heads up high,
their yellow beauty makes them glow.

Dancing in the gentle breeze
the blossoms shine beneath the sky,
winter doldrums to appease.
These ballet dancers soon will die.

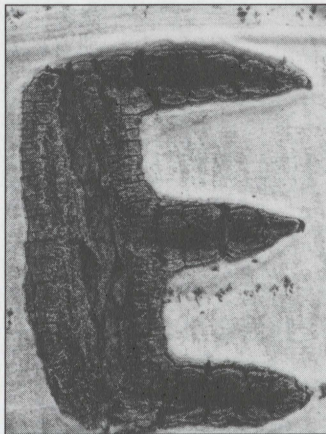


Photo Judy Cox

Moth Eyes and Butterfly Wings

By Judy Cox

Moth eyes
And butterfly wings,
Turquoise of damsels
And celadon rings.

Gold-shafted spears,
Where could they land?
They meld into stars
On the back of a hand.

Lavender twists
And jeweled pinnacles,
Seed center of petals
And citronesque tentacles.

Panels of fuchsia
Behind silver-hued spires,
Pearlized sequins
And criss-crossing wires.

Black starfield so elegant,
Flames in the sky.
Shadows on sundials
Hurling by.

Spring Haiku

Nancy Vogel teaches fourth graders in Crested Butte to think about where they live and what is unique and interesting about it. These poems are student haiku about the unique and interesting phenomenon known as "springtime in the Rockies."

Shining springing spring
glittering golden colors
rainbows in the air
- Jack Gowins

Green pines jumbled up
the sound of water roaring
crisp winds whistle
- Sydney Petersen

Wildflowers bloom big
bright reds oranges and blues
spring is coming here
- Ava Lypps

Rain hitting the ground
sweet wild flowers blossoming
chilling winds blowing
- Michael

More hail in springtime
fresh powder on new green grass
snow on chilly winds
- Ian Eldridge

Steep rocky boulders
fresh flowers blooming above
warm weather is here
- Chloe Hillman

Friends all around us
beautiful rainbow flowers
flowers surround us
- Anneliese Frame

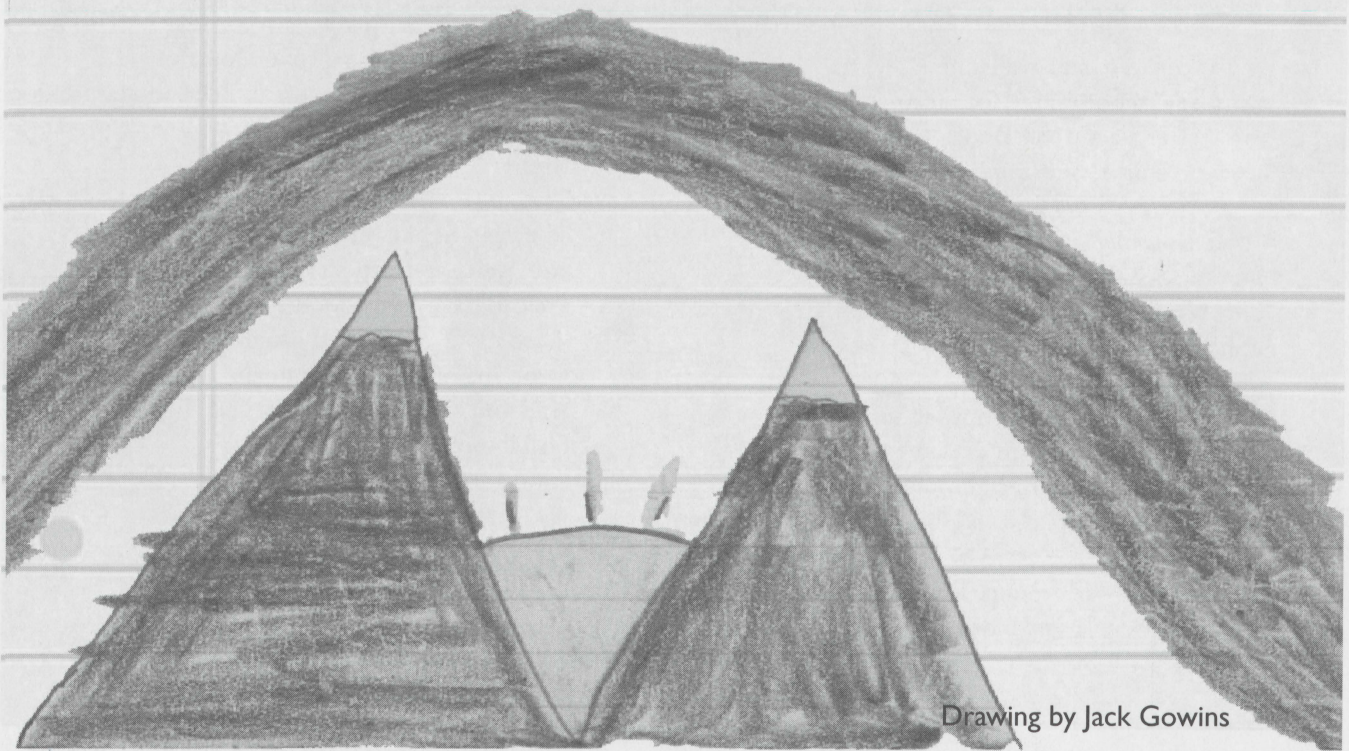
Small birds are chirping
brown deer jump across the road
silent bald eagles
- Woody Martineau

Colorful flowers
open meadows of color
fresh, bright, wildflowers
- Tiffany Taaca

Snow slowly melting
flowers peeking out the ground
sun surrounding us
- Charlie Stoneberg

The sun is blinding
the mountains are blocking it
bald eagles soaring
- Jarratt Bell

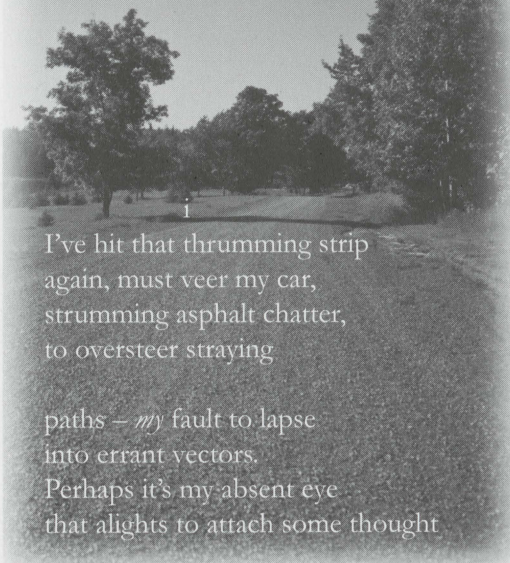
Biking peacefully
fresh wildlife is emerging
skiing in springtime
- Walker Carroll



Drawing by Jack Gowins

Rumble Strips

By Mark Todd



I've hit that thrumming strip
again, must veer my car,
strumming asphalt chatter,
to oversteer straying

paths – *my* fault to lapse
into errant vectors.
Perhaps it's my absent eye
that alights to attach some thought

to thought, or to grasp broken
shards of light, splintering
prisms in glass – bright scars
adorning tar or ditch.

I need to stitch my mind
to straits near the center line.

ii

Why can't life squawk rumble
strips? I'm not asking for God
to stutter staccato clarion
klaxon chirps, but simply

soft *ex machina* burps
on my behest, to halt
my wanders to left, or right.
Should some toad, unbidden, spry,

vault from my mouth, how about
a trumpeting throat to drown
my blather? What I need
is rumbling – replies On High

with clatter – to trounce my penchants
for impudent, hasty indignance.

Flirty Cowgirl Poem

By Mac MacGraw

You said your name is Joe
You work at that big ranch.
That horse looks kind of ornery
I watch him jump and prance.
I bet you ride the rough string
And break their horses, too
And teach them to do the work
That ranch ponies must do.
I'll work these cows tomorrow
So we can talk and twitter and flirt
And when you come back next day
Please change that dirty old shirt.
We can sit under the trees
And talk of attending the dance
But if we go Saturday night
Please change those dirty old pants.
You can check your pistol at the schoolhouse door
And hear a good string band
And we can dance up a storm
Then give them a great big hand.
They can fight over that redhead gal
And waltz and two-step, too.
We can have some good snacks
Then maybe we'll be through.
Drop me off at my front gate
And you change your socks and shower
So I'll meet you at the rock pile
Along about tomorrow.



Photo by Robert Valdez

Gunnison: a Thriving Place

By Jeanne Hull

To me, Gunnison is a place of warmhearted people, beautiful natural surroundings, and a healthful environment. In 1976, I came to interview for a teaching position at Western State College, fell in love with the people and the place, and have been here ever since.

The title of this piece speaks of thriving. I, along with many people I know, have done that. After fifteen years of severe sinus headaches caused by mold in the air, I was convinced I needed to be in a drier climate. The first year I lived here, no more headaches! Goodbye to painkillers and all the health problems they can create!

Although close family members and other dear people are some distance away, I found friends and support in many places. Gunnison has lots of groups and activities. When I arrived, I was told that the area had 150 clubs, and I believe it. Maybe today there are even more! Something is always happening, so much so that a person cannot possibly attend or participate in all the events that

occur. Volunteer opportunities abound, and there are groups to answer almost every need.

The environment itself is a source of many healthful pursuits. Hiking, skiing, bird watching, hunting, fishing, and snowshoeing are just a few of them. I am a walker and enjoy seeing the sights one would miss in a car—a flower in a neighbor's yard, an elusive bird, yards being cared for, and people to shop and chat with as I make my way. These are just a small number of the joys I encounter in my pedestrian forays. In Gunnison you can walk in any direction and see wonders. Walking slows you down and helps you notice and appreciate everything a lot more.

Yes, Gunnison is a thriving locale. It's a good place for children to grow, to go to college, and to just LIVE! I'm glad I live here, and no, I don't work for the Chamber of Commerce! ■



Photo by Matt Burt

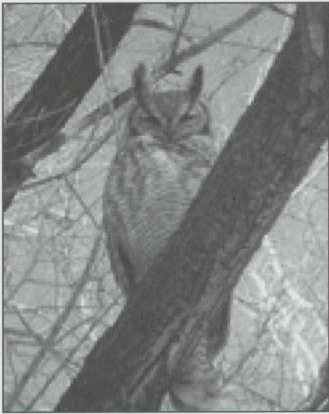


Photo by Kara Harris



Photo by John Nelson



Photo by Judy Cox

One Little Snag

By Morgan Fields

Everything happens for a reason, I truly believe that. Therefore, everything in has lead up to this moment in time, where I stand right now in Gunnison. Gunnison has provided more opportunities for me then I ever could have imagined. This semester alone I have hit my first rapid in a kayak in the water park, caught my first fish on a fly rod, rolled a 14ft sea kayak, and as a result of weather, only attempted my first technical 14er. Each experience allowed for a greater connection with myself, the environment, and deepened my love for Gunnison.

My toes slightly chilled, as I stood in waders too big in the cold water of the Gunnison River. The rod back out to my right as my left hand had a slight grasp on the line, and with a firm flick of the wrists it flew. Yes, It had landed right in the bubbles! With the tip of my rod pointed towards the sky, I slowly followed my line down river. Over and over, I repeated this same unfamiliar motion. Fascinated by the predator prey sense of trickery that I felt over the fish unbeknownst of the plot behind the string. The repetitive motion became soothing as I continued to cast but my mind utterly focused on the task at hand. All of a sudden, the float dipped bellow the water, I jerk back on my line, set the fly, and slowly pulled the culprit out of the water. Glistening in the sun, the fish flailed through the air. With damp hands I grasped the fish only to be mesmerized by his beauty. The whole creature painted in deep bright colors. The dorsal side painted in dark brownish green so that when I glanced from above he



Photo by John Nelson

blended in with the water; a shimmering light ventral side to confuse predators from below as they looked towards the sky. For a moment I lost my mind in thought, the whole predator prey thing. The larger predator (me) had used my intelligence to trick my prey into becoming dinner. However the fish had been predisposed to the same sort of trickery, but ultimately we were all attempting to survive. As I stood, clutching the this fish on its side, revealing its true identity, I laughed because I felt that the two of us weren't much different at all.

I released my grasp as I watched him shimmer off to continue his predisposed destiny; this was only one little snag. One little snag in my line, one little snag in his lip, but this one little snag was a lesson that a young fish would never forget. This experience the fish and I shared would make him wiser, better prepare him for the next time a novice fisherman dropped a line in his passing.

Temped by the trickery, the unknown along the river of life, there may be a snag or two. But it is that snag that leads to wisdom and greater knowing that prepares for a stronger future. I travel down the river of life as a wiser fish as a result of a few snags. Therefore I embrace the lines, the mistakes, because without them I would never learn anything. A few snags in life have led me to where I stand in Gunnison, happy; and in the pursuit of myself with every little snag. I await the next snag. ■

Seasons

Poems by Rebecca Thornburg

The spring snow like a sudden inspiration
comes over the mountains
riding in a dark, hovering cloud
driven by unseen forces to swirl and dance
caught by blades of grass
hugging the tree forks
nestling in eaves
stroking the crocus
teasing the skiers
A desperate last touch
Gone in a moment
Leaving only a dusting of its former wintry self.



The cool, heavy evening air
Crawls across the grass
Up the wall, through the window
and falls on my warm summer shoulders.

The sky dims.
The day's strength pales as
Gradient blues turn to barely pinks turn to darkness
Summoning a moon rise.

A robust, pox marked reflector
Climbs through the tree branches
Barely lighting the smooth stones
That edge the path from

The sleeping house to the constant creek
Carrying winter's snowflakes past the land
To wider rivers where hoarded water
Dams the canyons to light the night.

The stream, the stream, the stream
Has sent the night air, the air, the air
Through my window.
I see the moon, the moon, the moon
On my cooled summer shoulders.

What is it about the rain?
Listen to its washing machine refrain.
Gentle cleansing takes away the dirt and stain.

Showers the trees,
Waters the leaves,
Gushes through the eaves.

Earthworms come up for air or drown
as the water siphons down down down
through fissures to pools deep in the ground.

Don't stop, stay a little longer
till my blankets become a little warmer
till sleep comes in a little stronger.

Night, rain.

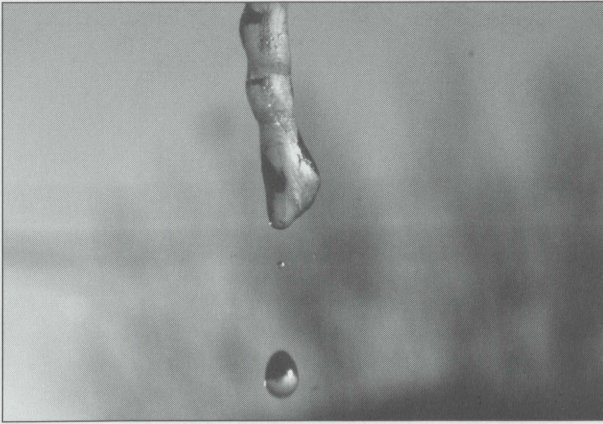


Something's coming. Can't you feel it?
Something unavoidable, formidable, dangerous, and deceptive:
It's frozen sunshine basking and champagne crystals growing
in the below zero air.
It's cold measured in inches.
It's time measured in months.
Say them: December, January, February.
Get ready before it is too cold for warmed blood.

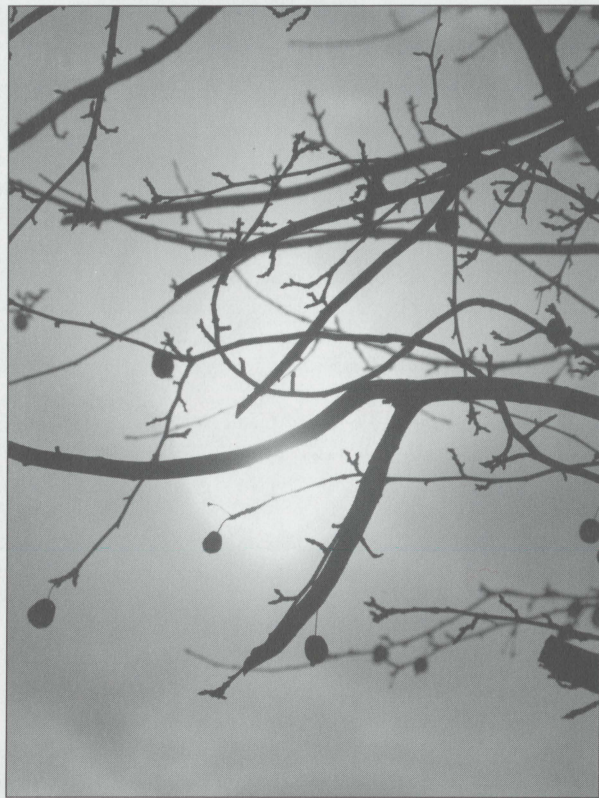
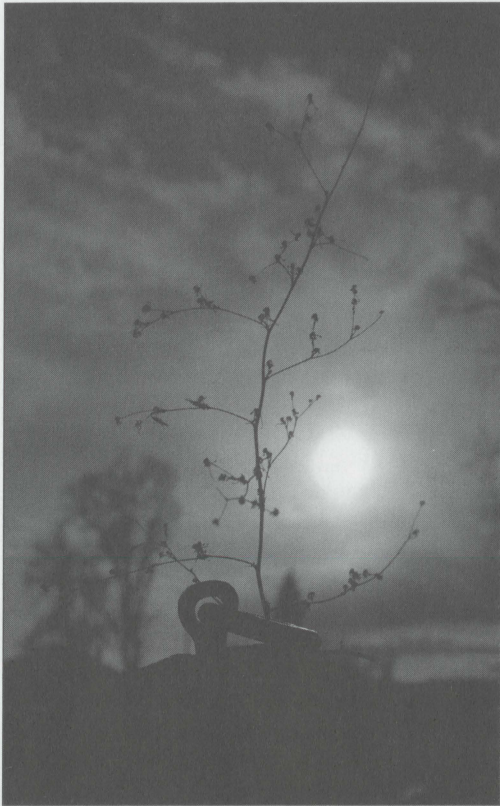
Chop the trees.
Stack the wood.
Seal the windows
Double the entry.
Insulate so there is no new air till spring.

Fleece the boots.
Down the coats.
Mitten the thumbs.
Turtle the neck.
Long the underwear.
Find the perfect hat to cap the heat leak.

Antifreeze the radiator.
Chain the tires.
Find the shovel.
Salt the walks.
Feeder the birds.
Call it by its name: Winter! Its name is winter!
It's winter that is coming...



Photos by Ivan Ocampo



Gunnison Valley School



All these photographs were taken by Ivan Ocampo. All except the water drop are from his self titled "Sunset" collection. The water drop photograph was part of a challenge assignment Ivan was given to help him learn how to operate the manual functions on the camera. Ivan took numerous photographs, adjusting the shutter speed and aperture in order to achieve a shallow depth of field and the action of the water falling from the icicle. Ivan is a student at GVS, Gunnison's alternative high school.

Gunnison Valley Journal Contributors

Matthew Allison is an occasional writer who majored in English at the University of Kentucky. He is single and moved to the Gunnison area from Denver in late 2009. So far, he really likes it here.

Jan Badgley, a 40-year resident in the valley, graduated from Western with an English major and minors in communications, theater and journalism, and is applying them all here - founding publisher, editor, writer and photographer for Hometown Happenings; tap-dance teacher, actress and director at the Gunnison Arts Center; and stunt actress for that classic film *Snow Beast*.

Wendy Beukelman has lived in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Colorado and Nebraska. Returning to Colorado 2009, she now resides in Almont with her husband and son. She enjoys Gunnison Valley as a stay-at-home mother, student and aspiring writer.

Judy Cox often writes from the sanctuary of her cabin home where the wilderness speaks to her taking the form of art and photography as well. Many of her poems appear in her book, *Sending Forth the Seed*.

Phoebe Cranor lived in Gunnison from the time she married rancher John Cranor in 1946 until her death earlier this year; in addition to all her poetry, she wrote many books on spiritual life as well as two collections of stories on *Ranch Life*.

Jackie DeVore is a retired elementary school educator and active juvenile justice advocate. She is a reader, poet and budding photographer.

Mary Dillon is a creative and capable 5th grader at the Crested Butte Community School who loves to act, write poems, plays and essays, and play the violin; she has had several works published in the Crested Butte Weekly, and has been in several Mountain Theatre productions.

Kim Eastman is a Gunnison native; her family has been in the valley since 1880. She values being of Gunnison and feels this is truly her home. She loves living in the home her grandparents built on the bank of the Gunnison River and she enjoys hiking and mountain biking.

Sandy Fails has sent down roots in the valley since 1981, working as a columnist, features editor and briefly (too much politics) as editor of the Chronicle & Pilot newspaper, done the freelance dance, and edited the Crested Butte Magazine. She and her husband Michael own the Old Town Inn in Crested Butte.

Morgan Fields is a student at Western State College who spends her free time off in the beautiful wilderness around Gunnison, climbing rocks, skiing mountains, fishing rivers, and hiking trails; searching for meaning from the depths of the rivers and the heights of the mountains. The pursuit of adventure is her passion.

Erin Skerritt Garcia is a long-time resident of Crested Butte, currently caring for her daughters Madi and Sunny in Seattle. Erin is a poet, photographer and student of spirit in nature, nature in spirit.

Danielle Blue Gillman moved to the Gunnison Valley in 1999. She is a 14-year-old actor, dancer and passionate writer, who has spent many hours on stage, most recently in the role of Anne Frank, and on screen in the 2009 movie *INK*.

Jim Greer came to the Gunnison Country thirty years ago from a fast-track life in the big city. He has worked as a fry cook, airport ramp worker, college administrator, janitor, day laborer, restaurant owner and a high country guide and outfitter. He co-authored with Charles Miller a book, *Riding West: An Outfitter's Life*.

Barbara Haas served 31 years in public education and other work at both ends of the Gunnison valley. She continues to appreciate this place which fills you on a soul level and where the magic comes in unexpected ways, like the days when the ice crystals in the air make rainbows or when the wildflowers bloom as far as the eyes can see.

Kara Harris has enjoyed making Gunnison her happy home since 1992. She loves high altitude living and everything that comes with it. She feels lucky everyday to live in such a wonderful paradise!

Jeanne Hull is a 34-year resident of Gunnison, having come here in 1976 to teach at Western State College. After retirement in 1996, she worked at the Sheriff's Office for six years. Her interests are in history, biography, philosophy, religion, science, travel, and just about everything else.

Trudy Jagger grew up in Gunnison and graduated from WSC in 1984, and now teaches elementary art for Denver Public Schools. She was awarded the "Mile-High Teacher of the Year" award last year, and fondly remembers student teaching in Gunnison with Shawnalee Petri, and a practicum with Linda MacLennon.

Virginia Jones is a former teacher, aspiring poet, and volunteer for many organizations (including the *Gunnison Valley Journal*) who in 2009 was given a Gunnison Valley Community Foundation Lifetime Award for her 42 years of service in the valley.

Derek Ketcham is 11 years old, was born and raised in Gunnison, and is currently in 5th grade. He loves most outdoor activities, especially dirt biking and rock climbing.

Katherine Ketcham is 13 years old, was born and raised in Gunnison, and is currently in 7th grade at Gunnison Community School. She enjoys almost every outdoor activity, especially hunting. This past fall she shot her first cow elk.

Gunnison Valley Journal Contributors

Betty Light has been writing poetry in the Gunnison valley since she and her husband, Dr. Mason Light, arrived here in 1942; she has published a collection of poetry, *Light Reflections*.

Julie Luekenga has been in Gunnison for 17 years appreciating, along with her husband, son and daughter, the dramatic scenery of the area. She is constantly amazed at the fresh beauty and new activities she discovers each year, along with the aching muscles she never knew existed.

Mac MacGraw is a retired cowboy and outfitter who enjoys sharing stories of the Old West through poems and essays, and has published several books of them.

Luke Mehall is a freelance writer and climber currently working in Public Relations at Western State College; in addition to articles in regional and national publications, he has edited and published some 'zines around outdoor activities.

Gregg Morin is a Western graduate who stayed, since 1982. He has been doing photography in and of the valley for more than 20 years; his work can be seen at the Gunnison Gallery on Main Street.

John Nelson has been a wilderness horse packer, guide, outfitter and campfire poet since Fossil Ridge was a seashore; his poetry presentations evoke the mountains and people where the poems all begin.

Linda Nienhueser and her family have lived in the valley thirty-some years; she is a county finance officer, mother and grandmother, and photographer and poet when there's time.

Dave Pinkerton taught high school for many years before he and his wife could finally move to Gunnison where he writes, hikes, skis and fishes to his heart's content.

Susan Powers, her husband and two sons have lived in the Gunnison area for nine years. She is an English teacher at the Gunnison Valley School. In addition to writing and spending time outside with her family, Susan is an avid runner, skier, and gardener.

Shelley Read is a writer and educator who fell in love with Crested Butte as a child and has been a permanent resident for more than 20 years. As a Western faculty member, she was instrumental in creating the college's Environmental Studies program, and now teaches a variety of creative writing workshops for adults and children in the community – most recently, for the One Room Schoolhouse (Orsch), fruits of which are part of the Journal.

David Rothman is a writer and educator who teaches at both Western State College and the University of Colorado, spending part of each year in Crested Butte and Boulder. He was co-founder of the Crested Butte Music Festival and founder and publisher of Conundrum Press; his writing appears widely and he has been a finalist for the Colorado Book Award.

Judy Buffington Sammons is a Gunnison writer of Western history, author of "Tall Grass and Good Cattle - A Century of Ranching in the Gunnison Country", "Riding, Roping, and Roses - Colorado's Women Ranchers", and "Keepin' the Peace - Early-day Justice on Colorado's Western Slope" from which this vignette is excerpted. Judy is a member of Western Writers of America.

George Sibley is a Gunnison writer and retired educator who keeps busy at other things in the valley as well as writing. He is a founding editor of the Gunnison Valley Journal; *Dragons in Paradise* is a collection of his essays and poetry, and he is currently working on a history of the Colorado River Water Conservation District.

Sherrill Stenson has lived in Gunnison for 17 years, teaching yoga and meditation; in her spare time she loves to write poetry.

Becky (Riemer) Thornburg and family moved to Gunnison in 1985. She worked with Gunnison REIJ as parent volunteer, VISTA, substitute teacher, teacher of fifth graders before moving to Kiowa, Colorado as a PreK-8 principal, and returning to Gunnison in 2009. Poetry is her way of painting using words instead of brushes.

Marcie Telander is a longtime valley resident, psychotherapist and celebration artist. She lives on a secret island between the East River, Cement Creek and a trout stream. She has taught and performed her poetry throughout the U.S., Canada, Ireland and Italy. She writes to protect and continue living under the protection of the Red Lady.

Mark Todd teaches creative writing and English at Western State College; he has two published collections of poetry, and wrote a novel, *The Silverville Swindle*, with his wife Kym O'Connell.

Robert Valdez has been fishing and photographing the valley for many years; his photography is on display at the Gunnison Gallery.

Brent Winston is a horse trainer and ranch hand who lived in Gunnison for the last 10 years, training horses, working on ranches, and guiding and wrangling for the Gunnison country guide service.

Marlene Wright Zanetell is a former GHS teacher and two-term County Commissioner who continues to work with others to protect the Gunnison River and other valley treasures.