



TAKE IT or LEAVE IT

By Jim Stiles

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HARD TIMES?

A STORY OF TWO PRAIRIE GRAVES

One frenzied afternoon in Moab, more than 20 years ago, the crush of tourists, the asphalt-enhanced desert heat, and the already disturbing first hints of a “New West” future driven by an ‘amenities economy’ got the better of me. I loaded the car, grabbed my camping gear and scurried out of town as fast as my ‘63 Volvo would carry me. I drove north to Crescent Junction and paused for reflection. I needed a change of scenery.

Left or right? I couldn’t decide. Maybe north to Jackson, I considered, but the tourist onslaught up there made our own invasion look mild. And then there was all that damn traffic. Or I could go west to the basin and range country, to the emptiness of eastern Nevada.

But as I stared at the map, I felt irresistibly drawn by the call of the prairie---the high plains of eastern Colorado and west Kansas. The thought of that vast wide-open country appealed to me on some level I couldn’t explain. I’d always loved the lonely expanse of the plains, the domed sky with its magnificent late afternoon thunderheads. I loved its remoteness.

For me, the prairie has never been, as it is for most, a place to simply get through--to endure--on the way to someplace else. I decided to find a quiet corner and linger for a while. And so I spent a week wandering its straight-arrow back roads and appreciating its limitless views and unpredictable weather and its sun-bleached history of abandoned farms and rusted out tractors and broken dreams. I’ve come back again and again, to the place so many want to avoid. Maybe that’s what appeals to me.

It’s a hard place to live or at least it used to be. Maybe the difference between Great Plains residents and the rest of the country is that they still remember how tough Life could be. As a result, they bear a deep respect for its fragile and temperamental nature—even its violent unforgiving side. They seem to take it in stoic stride.

This year’s weather has been brutal, from coast to coast. From the tornados in Alabama and Missouri, to the floods along the Ohio, Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, to record setting temperatures across two-thirds of the nation. On the plains, drought and unrelenting heat have persisted for months. Crops are in jeopardy of being lost, cattle are dying, but you’d be hard pressed to find someone complaining about it. They all remember the Dust Bowl or stories about

those “worst hard times,” passed down from generation to generation. Whatever we are suffering through now, with the heat and the tornados and the flooding, most people of the Plains know that, no matter how bad it gets, it’s nothing compared to what it once was.



One day last summer, we were headed to the plains on a blistering hot July day. On the way, the air conditioning quit on my car, but we pushed on, somehow tolerating the 100+ degree weather. By the second day, the heat was intense but luckily, we found a mechanic in Clayton, New Mexico who quickly spotted the problem. Lorenzo replaced the belt in 30 minutes and we were on our way again. Now we could once again appreciate the grandeur of the prairie from inside our little all-wheel-drive, air cooled cocoon.

We were exploring back roads on the High Plains, looking for nothing in particular, when Tonya said, “Turn right up here; let’s see where it goes.” The road shrank to two tracks and meandered a bit over a dry creek bed and into the sunburnt prairie. We followed it, just as the sun was starting to set. At 9 PM, it was still over 95 degrees.

We found a cemetery. Although we were miles from nowhere, it was still being cared for. A fence kept out the cattle and what passed for grass had been recently mowed. As we wandered among the gravestones, we were hard pressed to find anyone who had been buried here more recently than 40 years ago. Yet somebody still remembered this place enough to maintain it.

Like all cemeteries, the markers told us a story. We came to recognize the prominent families, both by the number of stones and the quality of the monuments. Even now, it was clear to see who were the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots.’ We could see who had managed to live long enough to become the patriarchs and matriarchs and whose lives had been cut short. We found many children’s graves.

One small marker was especially moving. It said:

ERNEST ALEXANDER, JR
FEB. 4, 1925 - FEB. 9, 1927

ERNEST ALEXANDER, JR.
DEC. 4, 1927 - DEC. 7, 1927

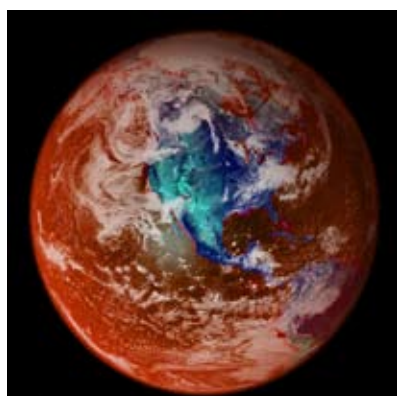
At first we were puzzled by the two shared names. But then, as we looked more closely at the dates, it became painfully apparent what had happened. Ernest Alexander and his wife had given birth to young Ernest, Jr during the cold winter of 1925. He had only managed to live two years and the Alexanders had buried their infant son out here on this wide lonely plain. Barely a month later, Mrs. Alexander became pregnant again. She gave birth to another son on December 4, 1927, and they named him Ernest Jr. as well. He lived three days. He was buried beside his brother and a common stone was placed over them both.

We searched in vain for the gravestones of the parents but could find neither—perhaps the pain of losing two sons in two years was more than they could endure and they left the country. I guess we will never know.

As we walked through the dry grass and closed the cemetery gate, we could barely imagine the hardships these people had endured; the land still looks much as it did then, but to imagine living there without the conveniences

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of the 21st Century, when we were truly honest with ourselves, was a sobering proposition. Many of us talk about getting “back to the Land,” or of living a pastoral life we seek only for its gentle simplicity. We refer to ‘wilderness’ in such poetic, grand terms, but we never fully appreciate the brutal unforgiving nature of Nature and the burdens and hardships and tragedies our ancestors faced and ac-



What dreadful hot weather we have!
It keeps me
in a continual state
of inelegance.

~Jane Austen

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cepted along the way.

I remember the lines from T.K. Whipple. He wrote:

“Our forefathers had civilization inside themselves, the wild outside. We live in the civilization they created, but within us the wilderness still lingers. What they dreamed, we live, and what they lived, we dream.”

We turned back onto the main gravel road, cranked up the air conditioning, and headed north.

IS MOAB REALLY GOING ‘GREEN?’

In the ongoing and relentless, mind-numbing debate on the subject of climate change, there seem to be three dominant and competing points of view. A portion of the population, including several presidential candidates, believe human-caused climate change is “a hoax,” that it’s simply not happening, and they insist that further discussion of the subject is time and money wasted and no more.



At one point more than 14% of Moab was purchasing its power from Blue Sky...

At the other end of the scale, though just as passionate as the relative handful of us (I include myself in this category) who believe the stakes are far greater than we realize, that the future not just of humanity is at stake, but much of life on Earth as we know it. We believe that merely tweaking our consumptive and excessive lifestyle will do nothing to improve our condition and that our propensity to overpopulate the planet, combined with our voracious appetite for ‘stuff’ will bring with it dire consequences. Sacrifice and ‘something entirely different’ is our only hope.

And then there are the Tweakers, the vast portion of the human population who believes we can keep living the American Dream, (or the Chinese Dream, or...) simply by making our consumptive ways a bit more efficient and less guilt-ridden. Thus the reusable shopping bag, the hybrid engine, the bio-Diesel Hummer, and the all natural, recycled condom. We want to feel good about the planet, the future, and especially about ourselves. It’s a natural impulse.

But...we don’t want to give anything up.

As the issue of global warming began to dominate the headlines a few years ago, Moab, Utah, once the Uranium Capital of the World and now one of the new breed of up-scale New West towns dotting the landscape of the Rocky Mountains, decided to do some tweaking of its own.

In 2006 Moab (incorporated) used 49,234,006 KWH of electricity. By 2010, electrical consumption had grown by...more than 15%.

The 1990s saw unprecedented growth and development in Moab and Grand County, though its permanent population rose at a slower pace. The ‘gateway’ community of Moab proved to be worth its weight in real estate as home prices skyrocketed. By 2005, more than half the homes in the county were owned by non-residents. Prices grew ten-fold in 20 years. Construction, both business and residential, exploded.

But New Moab represented a demographic shift for this once isolated rural community. The once conservative community began to lean a bit left. A more “progressive” political presence began to be seen on the city and county councils. In 2003, Moab’s Mayor Dave Sakrison proposed a ‘greener’ city government and authorized the purchase of wind power to meet 50% of the City Office building’s electrical demands.

Then the mayor upped the stakes when he urged Moabites to buy pollution-free wind energy via Utah Power’s Blue Sky voluntary wind program. He set a goal of 5% of the Moab

population; in a month enough citizens had joined to make Moab the region’s first Blue Sky Community. Inspired and ready to take “green power’ farther, citizens worked with the EPA to establish the Green Power Community Partner designation. The title was bestowed on communities that purchase a significant portion of their electricity from renewable resources; Moab became the country’s first “EPA Green Power Community.”

Mayor Sakrison promised, “This is only the beginning; our next phase is energy efficiency in Moab,” and supporters fully expected the program to grow by leaps and bounds. At one point more than 14% of the Moab community was purchasing its power from Blue Sky, accounting for more than 4% of its electrical consumption. It could boast an annual reduction in carbon dioxide emissions of 5.5 million pounds. Other Utah communities used Moab as a model to pursue their own energy goals.

But by this spring, participation in the Blue Sky program had slipped; only 2.83% of its residential and business electrical demands was coming from renewable energy sources, slightly below the EPA’s 3% minimum to qualify for Green Power designation. Moab was in jeopardy of losing its status as America’s first green community.

The mayor noted, “We were the first in the nation and I sure would hate to lose that designation.” And they didn’t. A last minute plea to Moab citizens drew enough Blue Sky customers before the June deadline to assure Moab’s designation, at least for now.

But what exactly does this mean, in terms of energy conservation? By embracing wind power to provide 3% of its electricity, has Moab distinguished itself as a community truly committed to a more sustainable environment? Has it proven itself to be a leader in the conversion to “green power?”

Maybe. But recent power consumption data from Rocky Mountain power suggests Moab and Grand County are not that different from any other growing community in the New West. Electrical consumption is measured in kilowatt hours (KWH). In 2006 Moab (incorporated) used 49,234,006 KWH of electricity. By 2010, electrical consumption had grown by more than 8,700,000 KWH to 57,947,759 KWH, or more than 15%.

By comparison, the demand for power in the unincorporated parts of the county grew by about 6%.

The data doesn’t tell us where or why the demand for electricity increased so dramatically in Moab, but one thing is certain, whatever savings are being made, emission-wise by ‘green power,’ our ever-growing consumptive habits, even in Moab, are making ‘green power’ a break-even effort at best. Or even a token effort. Being a Blue Sky customer might make you feel good, but it won’t save the planet...not even Moab...not even close.

MY LAST ZEPHYR... AS A BACHELOR

I’ve been doing The Z and my life as a solo act for as long as I can remember. I never particularly enjoyed being a one-man-show; I always hoped my luck would change.

Finally, I gave up. I decided it just wasn’t going to happen. So I resigned myself to bachelordom and resolved to quit whining about it.

And then Tonya Morton walked into my life. She is the most extraordinary woman I have ever known. On October 1, exactly two years after we met, we’re getting married. I don’t understand what she sees in me, but whatever it is, I’m grateful.



AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2011

THE ZEPHYR

4/5...DOG of the MONTH

Meet the ‘White Dog’ of Bueyeros

6/7...WHAT WE FOUND, SEARCHING for ‘THE WAY LIFE SHOULD BE’

---Tonya Morton

8/9...GENE SCHAFER (1931-2011)

End of an Era for Monticello, Utah

---Jim Stiles



10/11...INSTANT MOAB---Terry Knouff

“Then & Now’...what hasn’t changed

12/13...COPENHAGEN & TERMINAL PRAGMATISM...

Dimensions of a Four Star FUBAR

---Scott Thompson

14/15...THE WILDER WEST

The Art & Wit of Dave Wilder

16/17...DROUGHT, CLIMATE CHANGE & SICK FORESTS FUEL SUPER FIRES

The Summer of 2011 in the Southwest

---Kathleene Parker

20/21...THE SPEECH OBAMA

SHOULD GIVE (but never will)

---Jim Stiles



24/25..HERB RINGER’S American West

26/27..THE BULLETIN BOARD of DOOM

From Mudd, Stiles & the Heath Monitor Files

28/29..SOUTHERN PAIUTE: A Portrait

An excerpt from a new book from Utah State University...

William Logan Hebner

Photographs by Michael Plyler



30/31..Mo’ from JI BO

from Ned Mudd, the translated works

32/33...TILTING at WINDMILLS

---Dean Wooten

34/35..CLINGING HOPELESSLY to the MAPS

WPA map of Death Valley. 1940

36/37..WHY I STOPPED READING the NEWSPAPERS

(including The Zephyr)

---K Hancock

38/39..LOSING SOLITUDE

The State of Nature #1

---Martin Murie

40/41..GAINING PERSPECTIVE...#6

Two Years in the Kingdom of Morocco

---Charlie Kolb