CENIZO

JOURNAL

SECOND QUARTER 2012

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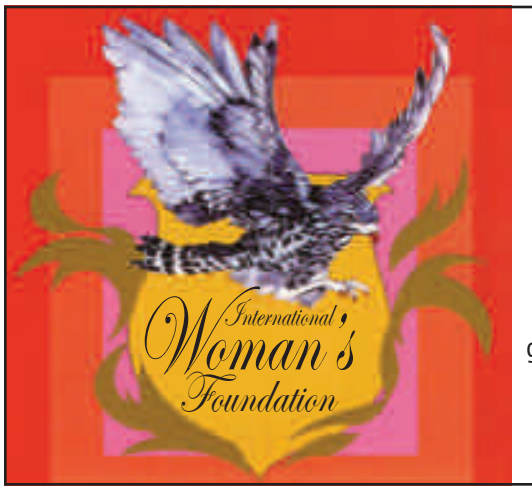

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Walking Poetry

by Scott Wiggerman

Like a flash mob, a small crowd with pens and notebooks in hand gathered at 8 a.m. outside the lobby of the historic Holland Hotel one morning in July – visitors, but not tourists; poets, my class. Each July for the past four years, I have led a class of writers at the annual Summer Writers' Retreat in Alpine, sponsored by the Writers' League of Texas and hosted by Sul Ross State University. My class frequently gets out of the classroom to write – and this was one of those times. We were about to embark on a walking Petrarchan sonnet exercise, as part of "Working Out Your Writing Muscles: A One-Week Exercise Program." This morning we were also going to work out our other muscles.

The instructions I gave the students – several teachers, a public information officer, a caterer, an editor, a publisher, several retirees – were to walk eight blocks down Holland Avenue, turn around and walk back six blocks, ending up at the Bread & Breakfast Bakery Café, where we would reconvene for brunch. The catch? As they walked, they were to take notes on the left side of their notebooks on what they saw, heard, touched, smelled, etc. on each block. At the end of each block, they were to turn something they had added to their notes into a single line of poetry on the right side of their notebooks. Thus, they would be walking 14 blocks and writing 14 lines of poetry, the standard number of most sonnets. They would also physically experience the Petrarchan sonnet's feature known as the volta, the turn in argument or emotion that occurs after the eighth line (the octave) as the sonnet moves into the last six lines (the sestet). Since I was more interested in having them focus on details than on form, I told them that the sonnet form was optional (as well as its specific meter and rhyme scheme); nonetheless a few brave souls took on the full challenge, such as Oklahoma poet Dorothy Alexander:

Photo by Dana C. Jones

This stretch of Holland Avenue was part of the route of the walking poets.

High Desert Town

Here on a seamless morning in late July
prickly pear stretches a spiny green hand,
begs alms of strollers with its sharp demand,
and nameless claret blooms seduce the eye.
Cedars of Lebanon rise tall and wry
guarding the Bien Venido Motel, and
daring red sunflowers with bee balm stand
to welcome travelers and turquoise sky.

Odd, the low-land pecan tree growing here,
domain of mesquite and dry adversity,
dusty, barren, mountainous, sere
where no one has ever smelled the sea,
and a sidewalk martial arts clay figure
looks more like Cochise than it does Bruce Lee.

– Dorothy Alexander

Poet Ann Howells from Carrollton also wrote a sonnet, less formal than Dorothy Alexander's, but replete with a volta:

Alpine Sonnet 1

An old mining town gussies up for tourists,
celebrates its railroad history. Historic Alpine – A Texas Main Street City, *even the tattoo parlor maintains a desert theme. No zoning here;*
bars rub elbows with houses, antique shops –
upscale and downhome sharing the street
with agave and sotol to blend it all – railroad
and mountains ubiquitous in the background.

Beans and squash become landscaping
at the motel, a light-hearted sign reads:
Hippies – Use backdoor. *This is a town*
where time passes slowly. Mardi Gras
ribbons still cling to the bridge in July.
A century plant displays centennial bloom.

– Ann Howells

I had envisioned the 13 of us more or less sticking together as we walked, but that lasted barely a block, as what intrigued each one of us varied widely, affecting our pace. Some of us focused on the "big picture," like Graham Oliver, a nonfiction writer who was in the class, while others zeroed in on specifics, like poet Christine Wenk-Harrison did with the gas stations along Holland, written in couplets:

Holland Street

Holland Street is Main Street in the town of Alpine,
with cars passing and dust rising from the asphalt like steam,
a "for rent" sign sits under a "for sale" sign.
It's unclear to what either refers – perhaps each other –
and further back sits a parking lot
more cratered and broken than the surface of the moon,
where visitor cars go in the front, regulars go 'round back
and a loaded trailer sits, waiting for some not yet arrived labor.
The persistent beeping of something far-off and industrious grates through the air,
above towers of metal loom and a sign screams "Danger! High Voltage."

In Alpine, the main drag does not have reserved seating.
Houses sit next to storage units; the Christian School next to the Crystal Bar
and a bent man in a cowboy hat stops in the Front Street bookstore,
inquires about an order for his wife, but he's forgotten the name.
Like pride, the vintage motorcycle sitting on the corner
and the locals whose eyes ask questions but mouths stay shut,
only the dogs speak their minds.

The walls, the flowers, the windows all burst with color
and everything is hand-painted, inconsistent,
same way God made us.

– Graham Oliver

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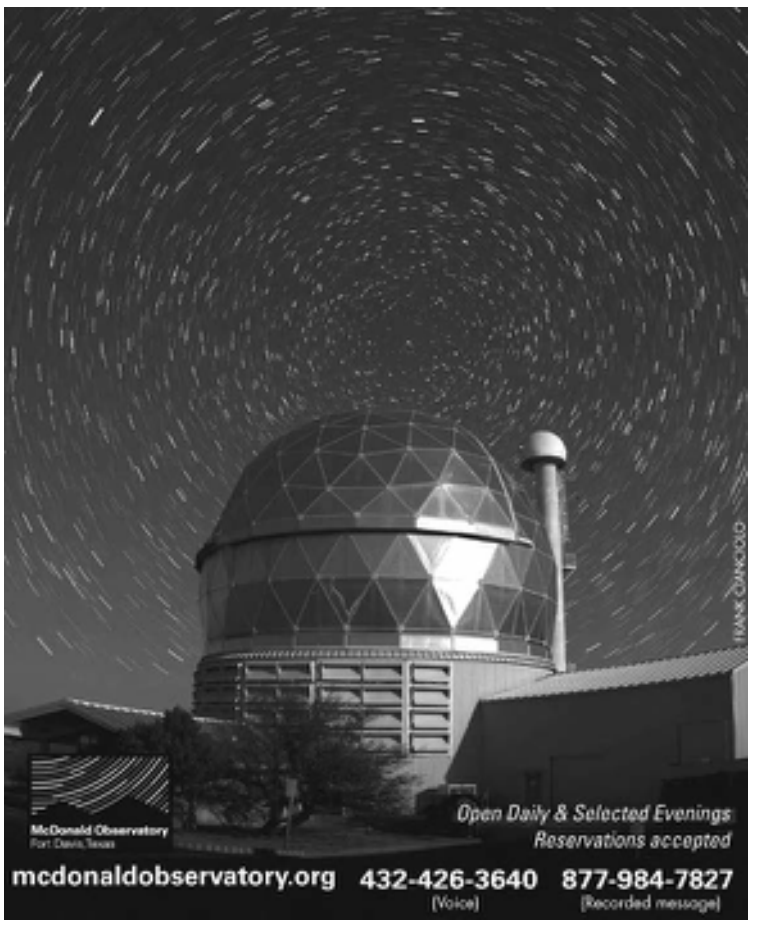

Editor's Notes

by Dallas Baxter

Again, spring. Though you can hardly tell since the winter has been so mild. Turkey vultures back on the dot of March 1 and the garden jumping out of the ground when you think you've got another month. The Trans-Pecos continues to surprise!

And let's celebrate the season by observing a national feast of verse, free and otherwise – April is National Poetry Month, and what better place to write poems about than the Trans-Pecos? We feature a full 16 poets in this issue – some new, some old hands at turning a poetic phrase; some on our poetry pages and some within stories about writing poetry or turning first time experiences into poems. We hope you'll enjoy this treat.

The return of Texas black bears, the result of a combination of drought, fires and a rising bear population, can give many of us up close and personal sightings. Charlie Angell tells about his most recent bear adventure.

The Missions Trail is another springtime treat possible along with a leisurely trip to El Paso through the verdant Rio Grande bottom lands. Danielle Gallo now lives in Clint and shares with us the view she gets to see every day.

Marfa, Presidio and Marathon present three outstanding Trans-Pecos folks with stories to tell Jim Glendinning in "Voices of the Big Bend."

We know our own Marfa Public Radio is unique to our area, but did you know that many rural areas of the country share our love of radio for a wide range? The importance of public radio to rural America can't be overemphasized, as Barbara Novovitch points out.

Bob Miles times two! First an essay on Henry Skillman and then a review of Sam Richardson's new book *Twelve Lessons of the Desert*. You'll learn something new both times!

Alpine photographer David Kachel brings us a dramatic photo essay; Charlie Angell tests your geological skills with a Trivia quiz, and Jim Sage recounts the fascinating acorn woodpecker's amazing storage feats.

David Keller tells us what he knows about the history of the Chinati Hot Springs and asks for further information that readers may have as he turns it all into an upcoming book.

Poetry, history, new books, animals, birds and river trips – it's all here for you. Buen provecho!

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Art, photographic and literary works may be e-mailed to the Editor.
For advertising rates or to place an ad, contact: advertising@cenizojournal.com

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Nine poets – while not room enough to introduce them individually, all are members of Scott Wiggerman's 2011 poetry writing class and may be reached through him at *swig.tripod.com.*

Cover: David Loren Bass, detail of *Cathedral Mountain*, 9 inches by 6 inches, oil on board. Private collection.

Occasional Art: Katherine Shaughnessy: *Birds of the Trans Pecos*, pencil on paper, 7 inches by 7 inches.

Copy Editor: Andrew Stuart

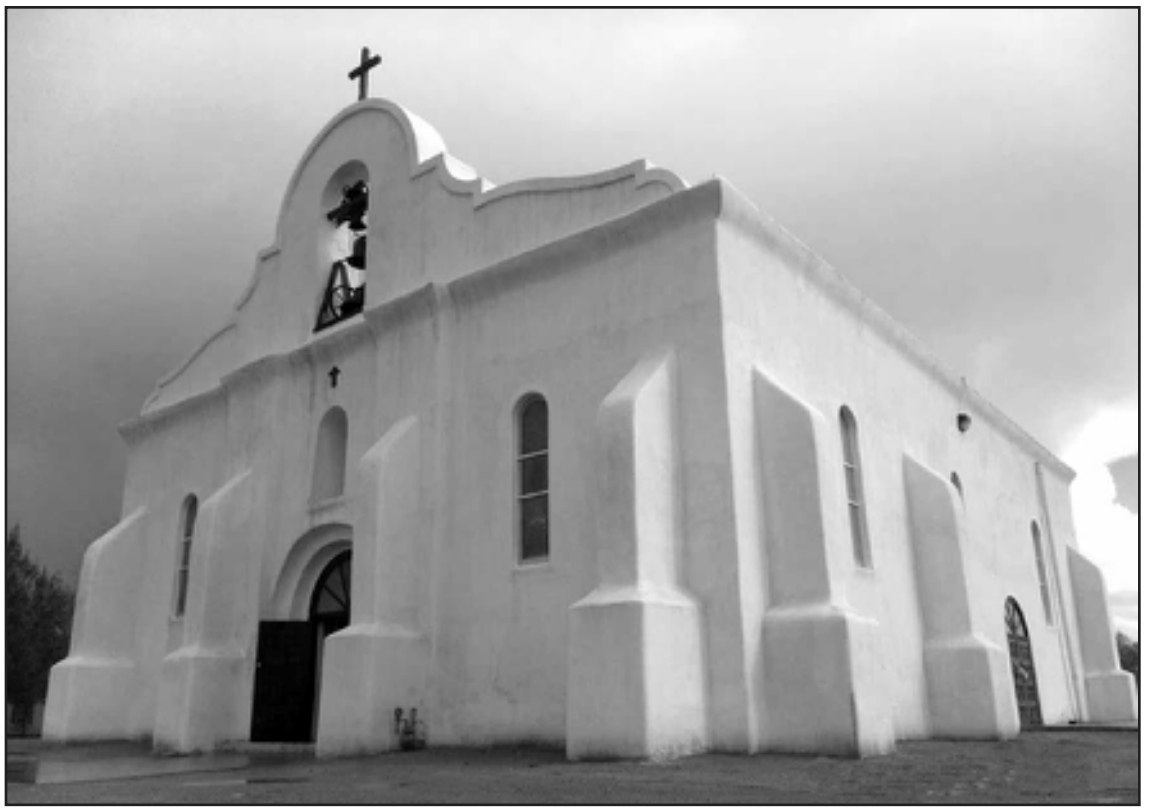

Photo by Danielle Gallo

With its massive whitewashed adobe form, the presidio chapel at San Elizario anchors the community's colonial square, in a classic example of Spanish colonial architecture.

On The Missions Trail

by Danielle Gallo

For the majority of residents of the Big Bend, El Paso is a place to buy staples, pick up friends and relatives at the airport and get a taste of urban life to contrast with the Big Bend's rustic living. Though it is one of the oldest towns in the United States, with most of El Paso's history tucked away among purely utilitarian structures it can be difficult to find the gems of bygone eras.

Just minutes to the east of the city is a string of just such historic gems, on the road known as the Missions Trail. Here, like time in the rings of an ancient tree, the history of El Paso can be traced to the earliest Spanish settlements of the 17th century. All three missions along this trail are still privately owned by the Catholic Diocese, and all three are still active churches.

The missions were founded in the 1600s by Spanish Catholic monks. The local Indian tribes, the Mansos and Sumas, both horticulturalist and hunter-gatherer societies, and the Tigua and Piro Indians, originally from northern New Mexico, built the missions from sun-baked adobe under the direction of the Spanish priests. The Tigua and Piro had fled the Indian revolts of the 1680s in northern New Mexico, where the tribes had risen up against the Spanish colonists, and taken refuge with the Spanish at El Paso. The area at the time was part of El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, or The Royal Road of the Interior, the road that connected Mexico City to Santa Fe within New Spain. It is the oldest – and was once the longest – contiguous road in North America. All three missions are situated within a few minutes' drive of each other on what is now Socorro Road, not 10 minutes from Interstate 10.

First to be built was Mission Ysleta, both the oldest continuously active church in Texas and the cornerstone of Ysleta, the oldest township in the state. Originally dedicated in 1660, the temporary plank church was replaced in 1682 by the first permanent mission. The Tigua tribe built the mission and named it Ysleta after the Isleta pueblo in northern New Mexico they had been forced to flee. The tribe still occupies the land today. The disastrous flooding of the Rio Grande in 1740 and 1829 severely damaged two iterations of the mission, and the existing adobe structure was completed in

Photo by Danielle Gallo

The mission at Ysleta, the oldest church in the oldest town in Texas, still celebrates Mass seven days a week. Built by the Tigua tribe in the 17th century, it is still the focal point of the tribe's religious community.

Photo by Danielle Gallo

The interior of the Socorro Mission features a classic cruciform design and original vigas dating from the late 1680s, many with carvings and paintings executed by the Piro tribe, who built the church. Mission Socorro, founded around the same time as Mission Ysleta a mere 4 miles to the west, was built by the local Manso tribe and the Piro Indians of northern New Mexico, who fled the Indian revolts of the 1680s to seek refuge with the Spanish at El Paso.

1851. Architectural elements such as roof gables and a rounded bell tower were added over the years, creating a classical example of the evolution of Spanish architecture.

The chapel at San Elizario was originally part of the presidio, or fort, which was established in 1789 and named for San Elceario, the French patron saint of soldiers. Elizario is a corruption of his name. After the Mexican War of Independence, San Elizario became an important farming community and later, in 1850, the first seat of the El Paso County government. The chapel is the most recent of the three missions and has undergone drastic changes due to flood, fire and renovation; however, the surrounding area contains some of the best examples of Spanish colonialism, with its wide plaza anchored by the chapel, adjacent orchards and host of 18th and 19th century adobe structures.

One of San Elizario's claims to fame is that one of the first North American Thanksgiving feasts was celebrated near the location of the current chapel. On April 30, 1598, after trekking for weeks across the Chihuahuan Desert from Santa Barbara, Chihuahua, Don Juan de Oñate arrived at present-day San Elizario with a caravan of 500 Spanish settlers. These included monks, soldiers, civilians, women and children, Indians and servants. Grateful to have reached the river after an arduous desert journey, Oñate called for a day of rest and thanksgiving. The settlers were joined by the local Mansos, and the feast was held on what is now U.S. soil, 23 years before the pilgrims at Plymouth and 21 years before the first Thanksgiving in Virginia.

Mission Socorro was established in 1682, with the first Mass said on Oct. 13 of that year. The original church was a hut comprised of cottonwood branches. The church, like its neighbors, has been damaged and rebuilt several times due to flooding and fire, yet it retains a number of elements from the original building. Built by the Manso Indians and the Piro tribe, the church is a classic adobe with whitewashed stucco, built in the cruciform style and ceiled with vigas and latillas. Some of the vigas were salvaged from the original 1682 structure, and geometric carvings and paintings executed by the Piro to express their happiness with their church are still visible upon them. The original wood floors of the Socorro Mission were taken up gradually and replaced with adobe block, and the wood was fashioned into crosses and sold to support the mission.

Mission Socorro boasts its own miracle. To the left of the altar, high on the wall in a niche, is a life-sized wooden statue of St. Michael the Archangel. In 1845, this statue was en route to Santa Fe from Mexico City, traveling by oxcart, when it was caught in a heavy rain and the cart became mired in the mud. The townspeople brought the statue into the church to protect it from the elements.

Marti Gutierrez, who was born in Socorro and works for the mission's gift shop, recalls her grandmother telling the story: "She said that when the rain stopped and the men tried to take the statue back outside, it became so heavy that they couldn't carry it. They called more and more men, and finally they were able to pick it up, but as they carried it, the door became smaller and smaller, and they couldn't take it outside. They thought St. Michael wanted to stay here, and when they decided to keep the statue in the church it became light again. It's only a wooden statue; why should it be so heavy?" Gutierrez questions. The parishioners of Socorro consider St. Michael to be their patron saint and still refer to the mission church as San Miguel, though it was dedicated originally as Nuestra Señora de Limpía Concepción de los Piros de Socorro del Sur, or Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of the Piros of Socorro of the South.

Originally, all three churches were located on the south bank of the Rio Grande. The catastrophic flood of 1829 relocated the river to the southwest, placing the missions not only on the northern bank, but a considerable distance from the present-day location of the Rio Grande.

Masses are held daily at Mission Ysleta, and each mission has an annual festival on the feast day of its patron saint. San Elizario also has Los Portales, a small museum in the historic adobe buildings across from the chapel.

The Mission Trail is a stellar example of the rich history of West Texas, spanning three centuries and a multitude of cultures. It serves as a strong reminder not to take for granted the nooks and crannies of Far West Texas and of the treasures available to those willing to turn down what may seem to be a prosaic street in a familiar town.

TAMING THE HEALING WATERS:

The History Of The Chinati Hot Springs

by David Keller

The Chinati Hot Springs is not a place you just stumble on to. Tucked away in a rocky canyon some 40 miles southwest of Marfa, the tiny resort is one of the most remote – and hidden – destinations in the Big Bend. And yet, for more than a century, the little outback oasis has attracted a diverse array of people seeking health, camaraderie and relaxation.

Human use of the hot springs actually extends far back into prehistory. How far we don't really know, but artifactual remains as well as local lore indicate a native presence that reaches back centuries. Historians have speculated that the first written account may have been as early as 1684, when the Mendoza-Lopez expedition passed by on its way to La Junta. But the first definitive mention of the springs was in 1885, when a state land inspector noted several families camped there "testing its medicinal virtues."

Although legend has long held that Annie Kingston bought the springs for her arthritic brother in 1896, land records indicate the property was not actually filed upon until almost two decades later. By then, however, Annie's brother John Lee was already living at the hot springs and had been for some time. A field botanist who camped there in 1914 noted in her journal, "there are several camping parties below us, both white folks and Mexicans... There is a sick man down at the spring who stays here all the time with a Mexican boy to take care of him. His name is Mr. Lee."

Most accounts indicate John Lee had been a miner in the Klondike gold rush, but, stricken with arthritis, was no longer able to work. One of the Kingston's ranch hands told Annie about the hot springs, which at the time were one of the only known treatments. When Lee first arrived at the springs is uncertain, but we know that in 1921, when he submitted proof of occupancy to the state, the county clerk noted, "the said J. J. Lee is not able to work or scarcely walk. He bought the land on account of the spring and lives there... Mr. Lee has not been off of this land for a number of years."

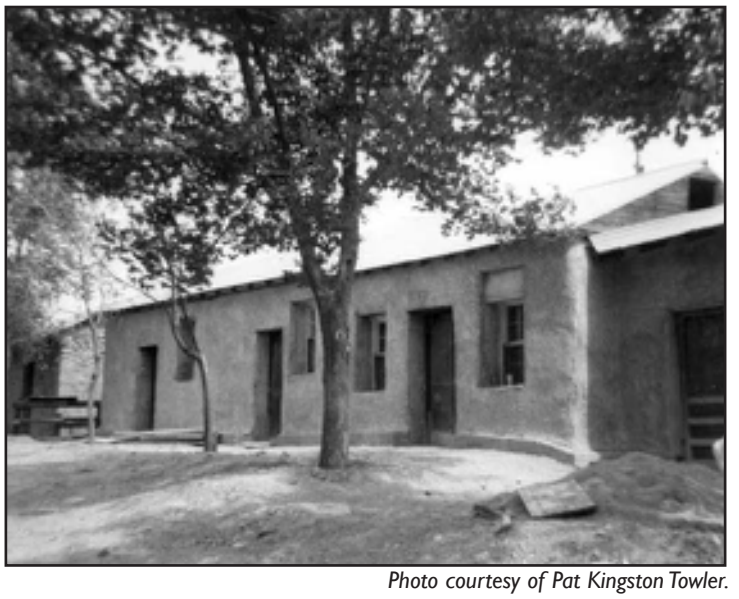

Photo courtesy of Pat Kingston Towler.

Photo by David Keller

The undated photograph on the left shows the three adobe cabins adjacent to the caretaker's house, which are believed to have been built in the early to mid-1930s. The adobe cabin shown above, attached to the bathhouse, may be one of the original structures and is possibly where John Lee, the springs' first know resident, lived.

The hot springs may have alleviated Lee's condition, but did little to extend his life. He passed away in 1925, leaving the hot springs to Annie. At that time, the improvements consisted of little more than Lee's one-room adobe house along with an adobe bathhouse and an outbuilding or two. But over the course of the next decade, Annie's third son Bill built several cabins on the property to accommodate overnight guests, and in 1937 the hot springs opened as a commercial resort.

Bill Kingston apparently operated the hot springs in its earliest days, and over the years it also served as a retreat for Kingston family members. But starting in the 1940s, the springs were run by Edith Rogers, who had ranched with her husband in the adjacent Sierra Vieja Mountains. Following his death, Edith leased the springs from Annie under the name Ruidosa Hot Springs.

Charging only nominal rates for baths and overnight stays, it was a marginal operation. Rogers began to supplement her income by selling naturally stained glassware. By sheer accident she learned that after being placed in circulating hot springs water for several days, glassware turned an iridescent gold. For years Rogers took special orders, in addition to selling her golden-tinged glassware at a tiny store adjacent to the house.

"These Springs are... pronounced by those who have tested it to be of equal merit to the Hot Springs of Arkansas. Several families are camped on the ground now, testing its medicinal virtues..."

– William M. Baines'
Report to State Land Board
1885

The hot springs continued to be operated by lessees until around 1967, when Annie's grandson Jack took over the operation, renamed the Kingston Hot Springs. Following his death in 1978, Annie's granddaughter Bea and her husband Jack Paul took over. Initially hiring others to manage the springs, in 1984 they, along with Bill Kingston III and his wife Dot, moved out to run the resort. While Bill and Dot booked guests, Jack and Bea ran "Bea's Place" – a tiny store where guests could buy beer, ice, toiletries and other basic necessities.

Many fondly recall the years the Pauls and the Kingstons operated the hot springs, a time when there was always friendly conversation and plenty of good food and beer to go around. But in 1989, Dot passed away and Bill returned to Balmorhea. After Bea fell ill, the financial strain became too much for the Pauls, and they had no choice but to leave. With no one left in the family to run it, and with a lot of regret, the hot springs were put on the market.

In 1990, New York minimalist artist Donald Judd, who already owned property in both Marfa and Pinto Canyon, purchased the hot springs. Well respected in the art world, Judd's intensely private nature and notoriously rigid aesthetic didn't always resonate with locals. After bulldozing several concrete block cabins, including Bea's Place, he shut the

gate and, for the first time ever, closed the hot springs to the public.

Judd was consequently unpopular with nearby residents who, for more than a century, had relied on the hot springs for drinking water, to wash their clothes and as a gathering place for birthdays and weddings. It was a strange time, some would say a dark time. Judd rarely visited the hot springs, instead hiring caretakers to guard the place, with strict orders not to let anyone in.

With the springs shrouded in mystery, rumors circulated that Judd was involved in the occult and that he held secret rituals at the springs. Although the rumors had little merit, following Judd's death in 1994 from lymphoma, there was widespread talk of the "hot springs curse" – the idea that anyone who kept people from the healing waters would be cursed with bad luck or even death.

In 1997 Fort Worth psychiatrist and photographer Richard Fenker purchased the hot springs with the intent of reopening them to the public. Having long been a regular visitor, Fenker was troubled when it closed. So when he heard the springs were for sale, he told the realtor to "go ahead and offer them full price. Tell them I'll take it."

Fenker's vision for the hot springs was bold. Inspired in part by the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, Calif., a nonprofit retreat focusing on alternative education and healing therapies, Fenker formed a nonprofit corporation with a full board of directors. Partially to aid in fund-raising efforts, as well as to connect the hot springs to the land surrounding it, he renamed the resort the Chinati Hot Springs.

Excitement about the reopening of the hot springs ran high. Work weekends were organized, and people from across the region descended to clear out brush, patch and paint the buildings and replace outmoded plumbing and electricity. In the evenings, the volunteers gathered around the campfire and with guitars and harmonicas broke the silence that had reigned for most of the decade.

Although a resounding success in terms of reopening the resort to the public as well as reinventing the spirit of place, financially the venture seemed like an unending string of difficulties. The constant struggle for grant money, and in coming up with ways to pay staff, ultimately proved to be too much. In 2004, Fenker sold the hot springs to landowner and former Tyco CEO Jeff Fort, who had already purchased the nearby Pinto Canyon Ranch from the Judd estate.

Although more modest in scope, Fort had his own vision for the springs – one centered around retaining its historic character. He also had the budget to carry his vision through, and in the first year or so added a concrete outdoor tub and a community kitchen, in addition to a cool pool for use during the warmer months of the year.

David and Krissy Sines, originally from the Dallas area, oversaw and helped with much of the work. Having been the last caretakers under Fenker's ownership, they remained after Fort's purchase and would stay on longer than anyone in its later history. Although Crissy tragically passed away in 2010, many fondly recall her embracing kindness and generous spirit.

Today, under new caretakers Dan and Dianna Burbach, who have overseen a whole new round of repairs and remodeling, the Chinati Hot Springs is fast becoming one of the more popular destinations in the Big Bend. Although some still come for the water's healing properties, increasingly the springs have simply become a place to escape – away from the bright lights, the noise, the frenetic pace of urban life. A jewel in the rough, the Chinati Hot Springs remains for many a place of refuge, a sanctuary with a history as expansive as the creosote-studded desert that surrounds it.

The history of Chinati Hot Springs is a work in progress. If you have additions, corrections, criticisms, stories, or photographs you would like to share, please contact the author at: flatbilly2@gmail.com or call 432.837.8829.

Voices of the BIG BEND

Jim Glendinning continues the tradition of his popular radio interviews from "Voices of the Big Bend," an original production of KRTS, Marfa Public Radio. The program continues to be broadcast occasionally throughout the region at 93.5 FM.

by Jim Glendinning

SHELLA CONDINO
Presidio

TIM JOHNSON
Marfa

PAT MARTIN
Marathon

SHELLA CONDINO

The first of eight children of Simlicio and Teresita Rivano was born on Sept. 1, 1972 in the town of Tiaong, Quezon Province in the Philippines and named Shella. Life in the family home was hard, with no electricity and water that required hauling. Much of Shella's time was spent looking after her siblings.

At age 12 she traveled on her own to her grandmother's house in the city of Lucena City, near Manila, where she enrolled in high school. Studying under a kerosene lamp, she graduated valedictorian, the first of 172. Already ambitious, she loved science and math, since these subjects were more challenging.

Her siblings followed her to Lucena City, and she found she was caring for them again. But her efforts kept the family together. In 1989 she enrolled at the Philippine Normal University in Manila, graduating with a B.A. in physics followed by an M.A. in science education in 1993. She taught chemistry and physical science in local schools for the next eight years. In 1998 she married Darwin Condino, whom she had met at college, in Manila.

In 2002, Condino flew to the United States on a non-immigrant visa as a teacher. Her assignment was at Eastwood High School in El Paso, where she taught eighth grade science. She recalls the culture shock of arriving in the States, particularly the lack of classroom discipline.

In 2006 Condino moved to Presidio High School. In addition to teaching physics and chemistry, she initiated a rocketry and robotics program, where the students designed and built working model rockets. Personally fascinated by aerospace, she started the course after reading a rocketry challenge flyer offering a $60,000 prize.

In a short time, the results have been startling. In national rocketry competitions Presidio teams have been finalists three times out of 700 competitors, winning $3,000 in 2010. At the NASA Student Launch Initiative in 2010, 2011 and 2012, two teams from Presidio competed, out of 18 finalists. In February 2012 a Presidio team was invited to the White House Second Science Fair in Washington and met the president, who singled them out for praise and gave them a hug.

Condino herself was honored in 2011 as National Aerospace Teacher of the Year at the National Aviation Hall of Fame, where she met Neil Armstrong. In 2012 she was named as Discover Educator of the Year by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in Washington, D.C.

During summer vacations she loves to travel with Darwin, who works as a correctional officer in Fort Stockton, and her three children, Gwynelle, 12, Gwyn Vladimir, 9, and Gwyn Aerrielle,7. The family takes road trips, which she describes as adventures – so far to 33 states.

Condino's aim is to open young minds to future possibilities. "Dream big, work hard, live right and do the best you can" is her formula for life. Her students' obvious affection and respect for their teacher, the $3,000 prize and a presidential hug are evidence that the formula is working.

TIM JOHNSON

Tim Johnson was born on Jan. 10, 1978 in Nashville, Tenn., the elder son of Kathleen and Okey Johnson III. Two years later Colin was born. Early childhood memories include walks with his mother to Radner Lake in Nashville, an early introduction to the world of nature and, with both parents, listening to bluegrass music.

His father's work was in the family business, which involved steel products, and in 1989 the family moved to Houston so Okey could supervise the company's operation there. They lived in the Champions area of north Houston and took advantage of Houston's music and art scene. At high school Johnson describes himself as "a

pretty good student," and he also loved basketball. Around this time an appreciation for poetry began to develop; poetry was something both interesting and beautiful, demonstrating the musicality of language.

In 1996 Johnson enrolled at the University of Texas at Austin, studying English and relishing Austin's vibrant music scene. His English teacher, Professor Craig Arnold, himself a published poet, took an interest in Johnson's poetry and had a huge influence in its development. Graduating in 2000 with a B.A. in English, Johnson then moved to El Paso to work in an emergency shelter for undocumented immigrants.

This abrupt change in lifestyle came from a desire to experience real life, which he felt he had not yet encountered. The decision was inspired by his uncle, Michael Gallagher, a radical Jesuit priest and immigration lawyer. The setting for this work was Annunciation House, affiliated with the Catholic Church, where he spent six months, before moving under the same auspices to the colonia of Anapra in Juarez.

The work involved helping with the primitive living conditions of the local residents of a dirt-poor neighborhood. He says this experience educated him as a human being, and he felt humbled by the resourcefulness of Mexicans living in hardship. It was extremely demanding work, and after 18 months he got burned out. In 2002 he moved back across the Rio Grande to continue his work for four more years with immigrant communities in Austin.

Marfa, and specifically the installment art work of Donald Judd, had had a strong influence on Johnson since his first visit in 1999, and in 2006 he jumped at the chance of an internship with the Chinati Foundation. No sooner had that ended then he got a part-time job at the Marfa Book Company. Two days later he was full-time, and one year later, staked by Tim Crowley and with help from his family, he was the owner.

Marfa Book Co., with its exceptional art books, has flourished under its new owner, expanding from book readings and art shows to musical and film events and showing a slow upward financial curve. Johnson makes time for daily poetry writing but not for a vacation. He has had two poems published and is an editor of two poetry blogs. Recognition by Marfa makes his work easier, as does the vital help from his partner Caitlin Murray.

PAT MARTIN

A gray-haired lady opened the door of her Marathon home and welcomed me. I had met her previously, but I did not know then how a long, hard life produced a nimble, vital 83 year old, who last year went tubing at New Braunfels and also completed the Marathon 5K race. This is Pat Martin, as fine an example of West Texas hardiness and modest good humor as you could find.

She was born in a hospital in San Antonio on Nov. 18, 1928, the second child of Cecil and Charlie Shely. Charlie Shely was a rancher from Bracketville who arrived in Marathon in 1901, herding a flock of sheep, a week's journey. An older brother Jack, who died in 2009, was born eight years earlier.

Pat's earliest memories at the Shely Ranch, 30 miles southeast of Marathon, are of playing with her cousin Fred, doing "boys' stuff." There were monthly visits to Marathon for shopping and the sound of passing trains – a reminder that an outside world existed – but this was primarily a simple, rural life, which hardened body and character alike.

Pat went to school in Marathon, staying at Grandma Shely's house. She liked school and also enjoyed playing volleyball. In the 12th grade she was class valedictorian; among her class mates was Biddie Martin. Finishing school in 1947, she enrolled at Sul Ross, but only for one year. She married Biddie Martin in Alpine on July 3, 1948. The couple then settled into a house at the Becket Ranch, leased from the Gage family, where Biddie was paid $75 a month.

Cooking was "hit or miss" for the new bride, who much preferred being outside doing ranch work. Three children were born: Ann in 1950, Don in 1953 and James in 1966. All married and have children, live in West Texas and remain in touch – particularly Don, who lives in Marathon.

In 1950 Biddie and Pat worked with Uncle Bert Becket providing horses to Big Bend National Park. Otherwise, the annual cycle of tending sheep and goats was the workload: lambing and shearing, driving the lambs to Marathon to load on trains and always the mundane chores with water supply and fencing. "Just hanging on" is how Pat describes it.

In addition to working the Shely Ranch, Biddie took other ranching jobs. In 1957 he started at the Gage Holland Ranch, where he spent 20 years. He also leased the Johnson Ranch throughout the 1990s. Ranching was beginning to change. By 1973 sheep and goats had been replaced by cattle, which were less at risk from predators. By the 1990s Marathon was a tourist destination.

Biddie retired in 2000. Meanwhile Pat took a job in Marathon with the utilities company and later with the Chisos Gallery, where she worked 13 years. Biddie died on Dec. 1, 2010 at the age of 82, hugely respected in the area and mourned by a large crowd. Looking back on their shared life, Pat asks rhetorically, "What else would you want to do?" and laughs.

Poetry

Red Cowboy Sixty Snake Sweep

A fragment with a certain poetry of its own
remembered so often that it's been worn
from a memory, to a recollection, to an auditory resuscitation
of a life left long ago.

Too often I forget things.
Only remembering them when they are left undone
or their immediacy returned by a smell or a taste
or a picture of a familiar someone
though I don't quite remember his name.

Andrew T Ross

Sanderson to Alpine
(A Pantoum)

The scene in my rearview mirror never varies,
An endless strip of blacktop, burnt landscape and sun-bleached sky.
Acres scorched by fire, fronds struggling to emerge from blistered cactus bodies,
The view through the windshield is always changing.
An endless strip of blacktop, burnt landscape and sun-bleached sky,
Sunshine and shadows play on mountaintops, highlighting crevasses and parched growth,
The view through the windshield is always changing.
I imagine prehistoric oceans sculpting this land in a distant past.

Sunshine and shadows play on mountaintops, highlighting crevasses and parched growth,
Dustdevils jump up feinting moves to further crumble these ancient forms,
I imagine prehistoric oceans sculpting this land in a distant past.
I see continuing erosion evident in sliding slabs of rock.

Dustdevils jump up feinting moves to further crumble these ancient forms,
Desiccated, windblown grasses are dried to the shade of platinum,
I see continuing erosion evident in sliding slabs of rock,
The scene in my rearview mirror never varies.

Susan Weeks

Noon Crossing

The river is a glutton for noon sun,
hones its light to a field of silver blades,
blinds me with its crooked arm that reaches
through desiccated oaks, holds boulders

in its elbow. My buckskin flicks his ears back
for my cluck, splashes in, steadies against
the current. Halfway across I glance behind,
stare back at hungry-rooted trees that claw

the bank, ponder why I cross here, plunging
from same to same, risking my old gelding's
footing against the treacherous bottom.
Maybe it's an old, repeating dream

I indulge: a vision of myself seen
from high above, crossing where Indians
crossed bareback, honoring the slow water
that slaked a parched landscape, sluiced life

across thirsty brown land. From a height shared
only by hawks, I can't discern my saddle's
shape, nor see that Davy's slick flanks are bare,
unmarked by prints of painted hands. Can't hear
my own wild whoop as we haul ourselves out
on the other side, drops whirling off us,
darkening dirt and scree where they land,
drying in moments, as though we'd never passed.

Ricki Mandeville

TEXAS BLUES

My house is cold tonight,
my kitchen dark.
And Robert Johnson's singing
will not warm them at all.
We have turned these images
round and round:
crow and calling bird.
My gift has been returned.
Her skin has no comfort.
Rain and reputation hound us
from every early morning door.
We are born from vanity and sin
and gathered from that station
into another's light.
There is no evil in her possession
though I founder in her
wake.
We are left to ponder deuces –
two gifts in celebration,
Two tricks to let us down.
And Robert Johnson cannot comfort us at all.

R.T. Castleberry

El Solitario

Among the candellia and ocotillo,
there is a spiraling tantrum tossed terrain,
with the scent of wild mountain cat on the wind
where the heart is a galloping horse
where the heart is a geode with the desert beating inside

Ancient caldera,
once a fertile womb of sand and mud,
your lost children were conceived of lava molten earthquake
and buried among sun baked thorns and cinnabar veins,
eons of bleached bone weave strata and fossil,
the crushed skulls of the ancestors are pinned like butterflies.

Lonely one,
the stars gather over you,
some nights the hand of God reaches down,
runs His fingers along the circles of your moonlit ridges,
dips into the Earth's marrow
traces the labyrinth

Darla McBryde

Photo Essay

by David Kachel

The greatest asset of the photograph as art is its illusion of reality. This illusion is also the main obstacle to understanding photography as art...

The camera compresses a 3-dimensional scene into two dimensions, miniaturizes it, falsifies colors, distorts perspectives, freezes time and yet somehow produces an image that appears inescapably truthful. So convincing is this illusion that a photograph is believed by most everyone to be a truthful record of reality, a hard fact.

To the average person the scene in front of the camera is something that is captured, like a baseball in a mitt, whole and complete. The final image is stored within the camera to be simply transferred to paper at a later time by any competent technician.

To the artist-photographer, the original scene is only crude, raw material. What is recorded at the shutter's release is not any semblance of a finished product. It cannot be simply – sent to the lab – because creating a record of the scene in front of the camera is the furthest thing from the artist's mind. A photograph transcends mere record to become art when the artist creates a new illusion of a reality that never was.

If you see in a photograph that it is more than just a record, if you see that it no longer matters where the photograph was taken or what the subject matter might have been, that it speaks to you on a higher level, then it has indeed risen to the status of art.

Painters often work from photographs. The result is something new. Not a painting of a photograph and certainly not something literal. The painting transcends the original photograph and becomes new art that began as an idea contained partially in the photograph, but mostly in the painter's mind.

It can be said that fine-art photographers do exactly the same thing. They also work from photographs, but instead of a painting, they create from a photograph a new photographic reality envisioned first in the mind's eye and only partially contained in the camera.

A fine-art photograph is an illusion, deftly crafted and abstracted from the real world. It is a half-truth that becomes a lie that evolves into a new truth. It is creation.

Photo by Tom Michael

The KRTS tower being built in 2006. A tower similar to this will be erected this spring in Gardendale, due north of Odessa, bringing a strong public radio signal to the Midland/Odessa area.

Radio for a Wide Range

by Barbara Novovitch

Whether you're a rancher working cattle in the West Texas desert or a fisherman trying to net that salmon from a boat in Bristol Bay, Alaska, public radio may well determine whether the news is at your fingertips – or at your ear with a mobile app – in remote parts of the United States.

Telecommunication advances, widespread public radio and mobile apps have made news of science, health, business, politics – the world we care about and live in – available 24/7 to the most remote corners of the nation – and often even to the most remote corners of the world. Beethoven, Gigli, Willie Nelson or Lady Gaga are also there for us to hear, depending on the musical tastes and variety favored by the station – and usually all are there, at one hour or another.

The stations also frequently stream their broadcasts online, so that listeners can listen through their computers, a plus where internet access is available but radio reception is not.

Some people may wonder why the brouhaha about public radio and whether it receives public funds is so fierce. This may be open for discussion in population centers where sources of information and dollars are plentiful. But in rural areas of the United States, public radio is the lifeline many people depend upon for news, debate, mental stimulation and entertainment.

As more Americans give up city or suburban life and move to sparsely populated areas, they demand public radio. And those who never lived in the cities are discovering they also appreciate the larger community offered by public radio in areas like Far West Texas, northern Minnesota, Arizona and Alaska.

Marfa Public Radio in Marfa, Texas has three dozen volunteers and three full-time staff who help cue the news broadcasts, conduct the local "Talk at Ten" interviews, relate tales of local history, narrate "Nature Notes" about the natural world, do book reviews and create recorded music programs from classical to contemporary. Calling itself "radio for a wide range," the station serves Brewster County (6,184 square miles of desert and mountains that is home is 9,300 people), Presidio County (3,856 square miles bordering Mexico with a 7,888 population) and Jeff Davis County (2,265 square miles and a 2,342 population). And counties and populations beyond. The region is known to some as 'The Last Frontier," a name that is also claimed by the whole state of Alaska.

One of Alaska's "wide range" radios is KDLG in Dillingham, a city of 4,922 people on Bristol Bay in the Bering Sea. Dillingham is only 33.6 square miles (plus 2.1 square miles of water). KDLG covers an area the size of Ohio, program manager Jason Sear says. Much of its programming is also repeated about 400 miles north in Unalakleet for some 10 villages of Native Alaskans, population between 700 and 800.

The Dillingham station has a special toll-free number for callers within Alaska who want to telephone during its popular afternoon "Open Line" show. That call is often the only time listeners can exchange family news on birthdays or other special occasions, Sear said.

"We average about 40 to 50 calls during the 60-minute program," he said. "They come from surrounding communities, the Anchorage area and often from displaced Alaskans living in the lower 48."

Yet another group of stations that fit the "radio for a wide range" description is the High Plains region of western Kansas, eastern Colorado and the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles, all served by High Plains Public Radio, which holds the licenses for nine separate radio stations.

HPPR – in operation now for more than 30 years – has offices in Garden City, Kan., but its main offices are in Amarillo. It maintains towers and repeaters across 10,000 square miles in Kansas (KZNK, KZNA, KZAN and KANZ), Oklahoma (KGUY) and Texas (KTOT, KJJP and KTXP) plus a translator in Colorado. Its programming, streamed as well as broadcast throughout the area, speaks specifically to and through folks from the High Plains – such as part-time staffer Skip Mancini's "Growing on the High Plains," a weekly gardening advice program, and "High Plains History," another Mancini offering that highlights events, places, people and humorous incidents from two centuries of human High Plains settlement.

Mancini used to live in San Francisco, but she returned to the High Plains area and joined the HPPR community of some 60,000 listeners. An HPPR volunteer, Ruth Beasley, adds soundscapes crafted to help listeners learn and remember the songs of birds that live in or pass through the High Plains.

John Stark, general manager at KNAU in Flagstaff, Ariz., said his station's listening area counts perhaps eight persons per square mile. "We maintain 13 transmitters across a huge geographic area. Flagstaff is in Coconino County – the size of Maryland, including the Chesapeake Bay – the second largest in the country geographically. But our coverage goes beyond that – it includes the Grand Canyon and the Navajo nation."

Financial support from Northern Arizona University allows the wide-ranging station to operate "at a much higher level than we would if we were entirely independent of the university," Stark said. Focusing on "our sense of place," he added, means public radio becomes "a glue that unifies the region."

"Everyone in northern Arizona faces issues of water scarcity, threats of forest fire, of the economy, of limited jobs, and those become somewhat universal subjects. There's no other media outlet that speaks directly to the people of northern Arizona as we do. Towns and cities in our region have newspapers, often weekly newspapers, but people in Flagstaff don't read the Prescott or the Kingman newspaper."

For its Navajo Nation listeners, KNAU calls attention to such scientific news as a recent study documenting that eating canned meat such as Spam increases the risk of diabetes among Native Americans. And catering to an international population of people who have migrated to the desert regions, the station includes BBC World Service news and classical music programs in the morning and in the afternoon.

KAXE, in sparsely settled northern Minnesota, was a pioneer in community-based radio, beginning in the early 70s. It now has stations in Grand Rapids, Bemidji, Brainerd, Hibbing and Bagley. As more of its listeners begin to listen online, early this year it pitched its fund-raising to nearly 30,000 online audio-stream listeners.

KRTS Marfa Public Radio became a reality in February 2006, when former CBS newsman and native Texan Dan Rather flipped a switch from the studio in Marfa, a gesture heralded in *New York Times* coverage of the event as filling "the last black hole" for NPR service in the West.

Last year, KRTS gained national fame through its coverage of area wildfires that destroyed 40 homes in Fort Davis and left much of West Texas looking "like the newsreels of Baghdad," a headline in the *Austin American-Statesman* said.

KRTS' listener loyalty was clearly part of a recent decision by the KOCV station at Odessa College in Odessa to accept the Marfa station's public auction bid to take it over. In late spring the Marfa station will expand its listening area as far west as Sierra Blanca, in the Mountain Time Zone, as far east as Marathon (KDKY, under management agreement with KRTS), to the south in Presidio and to the north in Midland/Odessa, where the new Midland/Odessa station, KXWT – the XWT initials signify "across West Texas" – will erect a tower in Gardendale to better service the area.

All the "wide-range" radio stations rely on pledge drives to boost their funding, but funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, repeatedly threatened in Congress, is also important. Said Deb Oyler, executive director of HPPR: "If we were to lose CPB funding that would really be tough."

Stark of KNAU echoed Oyler's concern. "It's been threatened numerous times over the years, but there's never been a more serious threat than now."

Bruce Theriault, CPB's senior vice president of radio, acknowledged in a telephone interview that "some in Congress have proposed to zero us out."

Though public radio continues to be threatened with cutbacks in funding, its listeners clearly consider it a necessity. And perhaps the question is worth asking: Is less than $1.35 per person per year from federal funding (the Corporation for Public Broadcasting contribution to national public radio) worth erasing?

Henry Skillman in a conceptual sketch by Bill Leftwich.

Captain
Henry Skillman, C.S.A.

Renowned southwestern mail and stagecoach man. Born in Kentucky. Came to Texas before 1846. Served as a U.S. Army scout in Mexican War.

About 1851 established the first mail service between San Antonio and El Paso. When the first Butterfield Overland Stagecoach in 1858 made a bid to establish fast service to the West Coast, was selected to drive perilous Comanche Indian area from Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos to El Paso. Made it in four days without rest or relief, his 6-foot frame draped with revolvers and Bowie knives.

A Confederate scout in the Civil War. From July 1862, when Federals seized El Paso and the Davis Mountains (to make the longest enemy occupation in Texas), served as liaison between regular Confederate troops and the C.S.A. patriots who plotted in their refugee colony in Juarez to recapture West Texas. Knowing country well, came and went at will. Spread false rumors of Confederates massing in deserts, to divert Federal troops from combat. Came to be most dreaded scout known to the occupation. Was hunted by special force commissioned to take him alive. In showdown at Spencer's Ranch near here on April 3, 1864, fought to his death.

1964

Photo courtesy Archives of the Big Bend, Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas

HENRY SKILLMAN

by Bob Miles

This lengthy marker stands on St. Francis Plaza in Presidio, near where Henry Skillman was gunned down by Union forces in the early hours of April 15 (not April 3) in 1864. However, it is but a brief summary of the life of this remarkable frontiersman.

Skillman was actually born in New Jersey in 1814, but his family soon moved to Kentucky. While there are many gaps in his life story, by the 1840s he was working as a courier and freighter on the Santa Fe Trail. He was en route to Chihuahua with the trade caravan when the Mexican War began.

Skillman soon found himself a member of Col. Alexander Doniphan's Trader Battalion, a group of traders who volunteered to serve as soldiers. He was elected captain of one company during the battle of Sacramento. Skillman later led a group of adventurers known as the Chihuahua Rangers for the Army. After the war, Skillman drifted up into Texas.

Around 1849, Skillman began carrying mail between San Antonio, El Paso and Santa Fe on horseback. In 1851, he went to Washington, D.C. and secured a contract to deliver mail on that route. While in D.C., he purchased a case of the new Sharp's rifles, to be used by his mail riders. Soon, he was offering passenger service. As there were no stage stations established, passengers, food and camping gear were carried in wagons and spare mules taken along. Armed guards offered some protection from hostile Apaches, Comanches and bandits.

In 1854, a prominent traveler encountered the mail train at Fort Inge near Uvalde. He described the six-man mounted guard as "...armed with Sharp's rifles and Colt's repeaters. They had, however, so much the appearance of drunken ruffians, that we felt no disposition to join the party." Despite their rough appearance, they made sure the mail and passengers got to their destinations, traveling more than 50 miles a day across wild and unsettled West Texas.

Skillman lost the mail contract in 1854, but continued to carry the mail for the stage line that replaced his and also ran a freighting business. On Sept. 30, 1858, he drove the first westbound Butterfield Overland stage from Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos River into El Paso. The

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AN UNUSAL GRANARY

by Jim Sage

Years ago, on one of my early trips to Big Bend National Park, I was hiking the Lost Mine Trail when I encountered a lovely little bird with a red crown, white eyes surrounded by black, a bit of yellow on the throat and a shiny black and white head. In appearance, the head was quite clown-like. I had no idea what it was, but soon discovered that it was an acorn woodpecker.

Years later, when I had left the nightmare of Austin traffic and settled on the South Double Diamond near Alpine, I rediscovered the enchantment of hiking in Big Bend Park, where I always see or learn something new. On Pine Canyon Trail – one of my favorite hikes – there is a huge old ponderosa pine, which has lost its top and is riddled with thousands of small holes. First encountering this strange tree, one is startled and mystified. As it turns out, it is nothing other than an acorn woodpecker's granary. Some of these granaries will have 50,000 holes, and it is a granary because each hole has an acorn stored in it.

Drawing by Walle Conoly

Acorn woodpeckers and their curious granary.

Studies in California have determined that these granaries are essential to the survival of the acorn woodpecker. While it eats mostly insects, fruit, seeds and sap throughout the summer, acorns are a must for the bird's winter survival. Summer foraging takes place mostly in the canopy of the forest, and the woodpecker usually comes down to the ground only when it has a bad day, dropping everything it picks up, or when it sees a fallen acorn.

Showing a near genius for surviving, the acorn woodpecker will choose pine-oak woodlands in which to nest, and it will choose an area of mixed oaks, so that if one oak has a poor crop there will be another oak from which to harvest. The woodpecker selects an area with pine trees, as they are softer and easier to drill, and it will choose an older forest, as the bark is thicker and more suitable for the granary. The thicker bark prevents the woodpecker from poking holes into the tree's more vital tissues, and that keeps the tree from dying.

Studies in California also show that the granary is one of the main reasons the woodpeckers live in large, communal families. These groups of families consist of up to 16 individuals, all of whom cooperate in stocking the granary and defending it against outside marauders. When stocking the granary, some birds will drill holes and others will collect and fill the holes. Only a large group can do all this adequately.

The mating system of the group is also interesting. There are usually at least two egg-laying females and six or seven males competing for them. Both the male and female work together to drill a nest cavity. The female then lays her eggs in the same cavity, and both the male and female incubate the eggs. Once the eggs are hatched, the entire group takes over feeding the chicks. There appears to be only one flaw in the system. Until an egg-laying sequence is established, the females will destroy each other's eggs. (I guess it's just one more dysfunctional family – but then, have you ever known a family that wasn't somewhat dysfunctional?) Of course, if I were as smart as an acorn woodpecker, I would probably see a clear and intelligent reason for this behavior.

The acorn woodpecker family is a noisy, gregarious bunch and quite at home living around humans. The birds are found throughout the Southwest and the western edge of California and up through western Oregon. If you want to entice an acorn woodpecker to your backyard, be sure and put out water. And remember, when you get one, you get the whole damn family – kids, cousins and all.

River Virgins in Santa Elena

Poem and Photographs by Cindy McIntyre

It finally happened.
My turn on the river,
one of the few here
who has not canoed or rafted or tubed
down the Rio Grande.
    Which is not grande. Not now
    at low water,
    diverted upstream by
    dams and irrigation
to a little creek here
at Lajitas, where we put in.

Me up front in gleaming Number 30,
    also a river virgin,
born in Old Town, Maine.
Bud at stern;
on patrol, John and Elaine
in trusty Number 21.

    November.
No wind, sleeveless,
dipping oars quietly
in the low water
gliding
then "running" the little riffles,
    sometimes hanging on rocks,
    good New Balance shoes (also Maine made)
soaked.
Darning needles and mosquito hawks
in tandem flight
joined tail to head in love,
webbed wings a glistening escort.
    Bobcat ears twitched.
    Mexican horses and cows switched allegiance.

Metates and a coiled fossil
lured us ashore,
    jay-blue sky
rimmed by an ancient white seabed
hugging intrusions from a hidden furnace.

By four-thirty, tents, sleeping pads, the required toilet,
cooler, life jackets, table, chairs, day packs
    and an old tire
found their places ashore
where the river
when swollen and grande,
wipes away the landscape.
    Bud brought little round steaks
    bordered in bacon,
    and vegetables and potatoes
    snuggled in foil.

A little wine (Bud again) and he read
Elaine's favorite poem by
Robinson Jeffers about the vulture
who thought him dead:

That I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten by that beak
    and
    become part of him, to share those wings and those eyes –
What a sublime end of one's body…

Bud asked, "What makes empires collapse?"
I didn't have an intelligent answer,
    though I thought I should have.
The incurious stars, the extravagant ribbon of
Milky Way
burn over all empires past and future. Later,
Orion's Belt peeked through the tent at several
awakenings,
    panning across my reluctant vision.
Apprehensions about Rock Slide
drove my car into a flash flood
but I found an air bubble and
escaped in my dream
so I was not haunted come morning
when life jackets were zipped.

I was on the Penobscot once, in Maine,
rafting with my son and nephew
and two fat ladies,
    oars frantically
    rowing air
    as we sailed over treachery.

But with Bud, who knew what to do,
I think woo-hoo
that was easy,
past Rock Slide and Fern Canyon,
    darting black phoebes, sandpipers rocking,
past a watching hawk, a bufflehead
    and Smuggler's Cave
    onto a shallow reflecting pool,
waving to hikers
at the mouth with Chisos teeth
to the takeout.

We stopped at Castolon
for a V8 and Klondike bar,
a final ritual
and tribute
to the long-awaited seduction.

Book Review

by Bob Miles

Twelve Lessons of the Desert
by Sam Richardson

Twelve Lessons of the Desert *is a SAM-U-L book, ISBN-13: 978-1461171461 and ISBN-10: 1461171466, $10. Available locally at Front Street Books in Alpine, Terlingua Trading Company, the Barton Warnock Center in Lajitas and the Big Bend Natural History Association's store at Panther Junction.*

Sam Richardson's book, *Twelve Lessons of the Desert*, is a collection of observations of the world around him in the Big Bend. Many readers will remember Sam (or Sam-u-l) from his river-guiding days or his column in a local weekly newspaper. He is also an artist and freelance writer who has guided tours in the Big Bend area and Mexico and been a teacher and a newspaper editor.

Many of these essays were written in journals in a small cabin on Rough Run Creek near Terlingua over a period of 17 years. From the desert of the Big Bend, Sam moved to the cool mountains of Taos, N.M., where he now resides, pursuing his writing and art.

Each lesson is tied to a month of the year and based on his observations of his surroundings.

Usually mild January is a good time for nighttime hikes, he writes, and speaks of the sights and sounds of the desert night – the wind whipping the ocotillo branches, the brief glimpse of a coyote. The lesson learned is to appreciate and enjoy what we have.

February's lesson is about learning. To the careful observer the desert has much to teach. Some tree leaves begin to appear, a ground squirrel causes a minor rock slide skittering across loose rocks, a chorus of howling coyotes – all go into the lesson.

March's lesson is acceptance. The desert begins to come alive. Vultures return from their winter migration. Cacti bloom. Tourist season begins with river rafting and dust storms.

In April, birds are nesting. There are more dust storms, and the desert heat grows. He watches quail march to the music of Mozart. The lesson is to know yourself and your capabilities.

May brings more birds, green mesquite beans and insect hoards. The heat increases, and, if the Rio Grande has enough water, the boating is good. This month's lesson is about holding onto friends.

June brings more desert heat and teaches about making choices. Bird eggs are hatching, and mesquite beans are ripe, providing food for javelinas, rodents and hungry coyotes. Too hot inside, it's time for sleeping outside with the spiders and scorpions.

July – and the heat grows. Cone nose beetles and scorpions continue to make sleeping outside unpleasant, but the heat indoors makes it necessary. Rain may come late in the month. Avoiding anger and remorse is the lesson.

In good years, August brings more sudden, often intense thunderstorms and always needed rain. Enough rain and the sluggish river flows again and allows more rafting. A good time for a trip through majestic Santa Elena Canyon. Censor blooms, once more bringing color to the arid land, and roadrunners play. The lesson is to not take yourself too seriously.

The rattlesnakes are especially active in September, so the wise night hiker will use a flashlight. Cooler nights bring some relief from the summer heat. The author takes his boom box into the night and plays Comanche songs under the stars, recalling the Comanche Moon and times long past. The lesson: Observe, exist, and be aware.

A lone coyote serenades in October, and the temperature continues to cool. Ravens play in the wind. Fog seems to lift the Chisos off the ground, and the colors of distant mountains change.

To be oneself is the lesson for October.

November brings the beginning of winter, but days are still generally warm, with some hardy plants still bearing colorful flowers. Memories come of the times before 9/11 when the Rio Grande was more river than barrier. The author recalls a trip across the river to San Carlos to attend a dance, of camping outside of town only to learn that he and his companions were sleeping in a trail when a horse herd passed through their outdoor bedroom. Lesson: patience and perseverance.

December, and the postlude deals with more introspection and other lessons learned from life in the Big Bend. Summing up the lesson – write your own legend.

This is a good, comfortable read that will leave the reader with much to appreciate and to ponder. As a lifelong resident and student of Far West Texas, this reviewer is in complete empathy with Sam's observations, descriptions and love for this rugged land. It is indeed unique and irreplaceable and can teach much to the willing student.

The author provides simple illustrations, which seem to show the Puebloan influence of his home in Taos and are a welcome bonus.

Bear? Where?

by Charles Angell

Early morning on Thanksgiving Day last year I met my group, a family of four, for a guided hike in Big Bend National Park. It was a perfect day for outdoor activities: cool air, few clouds, light breeze, sunrise painting the sky and mountains pink. We were hiking into one of the many outer rim canyons in the Chisos Mountains.

We began noticing many large piles of bright-orange scat on the trail, and, when asked what creature produced it, I could only assume bear. Soon we noticed multiple trees at trailside with claw marks and gashes in the trunks and broken limbs littering the ground around the oaks and madrones. These are unmistakable bear signs, yet each time I commented on the presence of bear in the area the group insisted I was joking. Winding higher up the path, I spotted a tall slender tree just off-trail rocking side to side. I was certain it couldn't be from the wind – no other trees were swaying. Sure enough, at the base of the tree was a black bear, probably 200 pounds. It slowly plodded in our direction with what looked like an open-mouthed grin on its face. We stood frozen; it seemed not to realize we were there. And when it got within 10 feet of us I stomped my foot and shouted "Shoo!" It abruptly stopped, looked at us, snorted and then disinterestedly turned around and shuffled away through the leaves.

This clearly was the highlight of the trip for my group. Quick photos were taken and conversation for the next hour centered on all matters ursine. After reaching our hiking destination, we took a short snack break and began our return to the trailhead. Upon reaching our previous encounter location, we were treated to another performance – this time with the bear high up in a madrone tree, climbing limb to limb and stripping off berry-laden branches to eat. We watched as it gracefully climbed around, sometimes deliberately grasping the limbs and other times sliding its feet along, in a fashion almost human-like.

Photo by by Bradford Barron

Among the branches of a madrone high in the Chisos, a Texas black bear forages for berries, oblivious to its human observers.

Being able to observe this feeding behavior for such an extended period of time was fascinating. I had been unaware how dexterous the forepaws of bears were; it reminded me of a monkey or an ape. Rheinhold Messner, a world-class mountain climber, wrote a book on searching for the Abominable Snowman, or yeti. His theory was that people would confuse the rarely seen Himalayan bear with a humanoid; after witnessing this limber display, I would agree with him.

Black bears were once abundant across the state of Texas, but as the settler and livestock populations increased the animals were extirpated through hunting, trapping and loss of food sources. Bear meat was a tasty meal, their skins prized for clothing and the grease rendered from their fat highly valued for cooking, lubricating and lamp fuel. The Native Americans utilized them for similar purposes – and would oftentimes use the grease as a bonding agent for the pigments used in their pictographs.

I have seen some Indian rock art in this region of quadruped creatures that could be interpreted as bears, and their one-time prevalence in the Trans-Pecos is evidenced by place-names such as Oso Mountain and Oso Spring – oso being Spanish for bear. The last of the bears in Trans-Pecos Texas disappeared sometime in the early 1900s, but the founding of the state and national parks here and the granting of protected status to bears have helped increase their numbers, as the animals have slowly migrated back from Mexico into the Big Bend. The Big Bend now has the only confirmed breeding population in Texas.

Last summer I watched a huge bear, easily 400 pounds, lumber across the paved road leading to the Basin in the national park. I'm fairly certain of his weight, because he was every bit as large as the taxidermied bear in the Museum of the Big Bend, which was recorded at 412 pounds. This big fella had a ragged pelt that appeared to be mange, but I later theorized it to be burnt fur patches from the fires in Mexico it was escaping. I later learned that bears regularly go through molts that can account for hair loss and discoloration and can also take on this appearance due to nutrition and health.

We continued watching and filming our furry friend, but the day was growing long, so we decided to leave it alone with its meal of berries and acorns. Before we left, it dismounted the tree and stood upright on two legs, leaning back and bouncing up and down with its back against the tree-trunk; its slack-jawed facial expression left no doubt it had found the itch that needed scratching.

There have been no known bear attacks in the history of Big Bend National Park, but it was curious to see this one had no fear of us. It seemed indifferent. I wondered if this was because it had grown up in the park and become accustomed to human presence, so I contacted park wildlife biologist Raymond Skiles for some information. He explained to me that some of the bears born and raised away from the park's high-human-use areas can be averse to human presence. He also mentioned that with the withering drought man and beast have been enduring, the bear might have been more focused on feeding at an opportune time, giving eating priority over any fear of

people.

As with any large wild mammal, one should always use caution and never approach a bear or other predator. Their sharp teeth and claws are fully equipped to inflict damage on other creatures, and they have a lifetime of experience doing just that.

Several days after this hike I returned and saw another bear flipping over rocks and rotten tree limbs, looking for bugs and grubs. When it saw me, it immediately bolted up the hill, so it's reasonable to assume it was not the same one. Perhaps it grew up in an area of low human use, or maybe it has a naturally skittish personality.

On our hike back it was surprising how much damage had been done to the trees by the bears, so much so that it looked as if a tropical storm had blown through. Madrone trees need certain environmental conditions to thrive, limiting them to specific areas. I assume they can survive this destruction from foraging bears, but it was disheartening to see the beautiful madrones damaged to such an extent. Some of the claw marks on the tree trunks looked years old, so this was not the first dancing bear to go a few rounds with the trees.

We made it to the parking area and debated whose photo and video footage deserved the greatest film awards, but we were all clear winners. Our Thanksgiving Day wasn't spent gorging on turkey, but we did get to witness a Texas black bear enjoying its own feast – and no doubt giving thanks that it can do so without fear of rifle, trap or poison thanks to America's best idea, the parks system.

See a video of the bear on YouTube. Search "Big Bend Bear Breaking Branches."

Skillman , cont'd from page 20

route at that time followed the east bank of the Pecos to near the New Mexico state line, then turned west. There were no relief drivers so Skillman himself drove for 96 hours into El Paso. One passenger described him as "...about forty-five years of age... he carries several revolvers and bowie knives, dresses in buckskin, and has a sandy head of hair and beard."

He had exhibited such stamina before, riding some 700 miles from San Antonio to El Paso in six days to warn the residents there of a con artist who was fleecing people en route to California in 1850.

The 1860 Census shows him living with his common-law wife Rufina Vigil at Concordia, now part of El Paso. His occupation was listed as contractor, the term then used for freighter. W.W. Mills spoke highly of Skillman, but also wrote of the frontiersman's occasional drinking sprees – at which times he would shoot up the town and ride his horse into stores, telling the proprietors that he was now in charge of their establishments. When he sobered up, he would apologize and pay for any damage. Skillman would not, however, allow others to commit such stunts.

When the Civil War began, Skillman, like the majority of El Pasoans, sided with the Confederacy. After the failed Confederate attempt to capture New Mexico, the vast expanse of Far West Texas was abandoned by both sides. Skillman formed a spy (scout) company, keeping the lines of communication open between Confederate refuges in Juarez and the military in San Antonio, spreading rumors of Confederate forces headed for El Paso and spying on the federal troops.

In April 1864, Union Capt. Albert H. French led 25 men out of San Elizario in search of Skillman. French found Skillman's party camped at Spencer's Ranch. They crept into the camp in the early morning of April 15 and called for the surrender of Skillman and his group. Fighting broke out. French reported, "...a large man rushed out of the bushes – and said in a loud voice, What the Hell is all this? Who says surrender? I stepped forward and told him I did, he quickly raised a pistol and shot at me...." Skillman missed, but one of the troopers did not, and Skillman fell dead. No one knows where the bones of Capt. Henry Skillman lie today, but his tracks are deeply embedded in the West Texas soil.

Poetry, cont'd from page 4

Alpine Gas Stations

Adobe walls, adorned by sculptural plants lining a patio
once selling gas, then food, now furnishings

Lime-green station, fitted with a stone waterfall, herbs, flowers
and hanging wood signs – Fine Woodworking and For Sale
Pastel flower shop posting: Open and Please Call Again,
bouquets not for sale; a lonely pottery swan left at the pumps

Deserted, decaying building – windows boarded up,
no coffee, no snacks and no fill-ups

A patriotic station flagging drivers down,
gas on both sides and tacos in between

A shiny turquoise and white Harley proudly on display,
adding color to the otherwise bland, major-brand station

Two straight, one-way streets, in and out of town,
homes for stations – repurposed, practical and waiting.

– Christine Wenk-Harrison

Certain images showed up again and again in the poems we wrote, like a vintage motorcycle, the Bien Venido Motel, "for sale" signs, stucco and squash. Some students focused largely on plant life, some on buildings and shops, some on colors, one on the cats encountered along the way:

Cats & Colors

I stepped from the Holland
wearing new eyes beneath
an oil-painted Renoir sky –
thick brush-strokes of blues,
film noir grays and whites.
Cloud-shadows crept across
backdrop mountains and rolled
onto the awakening streets.

My stroll past galleries, bars, shops
coated by a palette of vivid colors
revealed the town's cats napping
secure in their shaded nooks –
quiet creatures content, waiting
for Alpine to liven up their morning

– Travis Blair

I was totally encouraged when I noticed that most of the students had two or more pages of notes after only one block. But the people of Alpine took notice too. Cars stopped in the middle of the street to ask us what we were up to. Store owners came out of their shops to see what we were looking at. The few people we met out on the streets were curious and encouraging, even the skateboarders. We felt that we had indeed created a scene in Alpine!

A couple of students from Austin used their notes to create poems that expanded on the reality of the street, but definitely used the sights and sounds of Alpine to do so. Murphy McBride took the specifics to imagine a life of her own in Alpine, while a fiction writer in the class used the panes of glass in Video City to envision high school life in Alpine:

Cactus Flowers

We will live in the Sunday house
for sale, reduced, two bedrooms, one bath
a set of four dishes
but many glasses, mostly with stems
nodding at cowboys in pickups, first hesitantly
then with practiced ease

You will bring your banjo
I will bring a soft twang to my voice
We'll go to Harry's Tinaja
"All pickers welcomed"
They will ask us to play another one
not because we are so talented
but because they are so kind

In our own garden
climbing squash and gum beans
dancing the two-step
with men in pressed jeans at the Paisano
riding our restored turquoise and white Harley
through the sere hills
living as open as cactus flowers
all our colors for everyone to see

– Murphy McBride

6 Panes

Traffic swooshes and brakes click by.
Small town anywhere sounds.
Video City closed, Netflix-ruined.
Lights out behind the windows reveal
White paint on six panes faintly sprayed.
Like stenciling for Christmas decorations.
Paint rubbed away by teenage fingers.
"Michael + _____" "Sarita is _____".
Later cooled fingers returned to erase.
Where is Sarita? Was she cute, mean, pretty, fat?
Who is Michael with now? Who had been erased?

The whip arc of a teenage relationship.
Erased before the paint even dried?
In my day boys gave girls big silver ID bracelets.
In the morning before school.
After pondering the lightning strike all night.
Full intentions of marrying someday.
Took them back or had them flung at them by day's end.

Temporary. Temporal. Tempo.

– Reba Saxon

It's amazing what you can notice if you take the time to look – and we did. The walk through Alpine provided enough source material for several poems, far too much for one 14-line poem (and, indeed, students have sent me a number of poems in addition to the "walking sonnet" that came out of the morning's notes). Whitman claimed, "Every cubic inch of space is a miracle," and we found the miracle of poetry in every step along Holland Avenue. As we stopped to take notes and write lines along the eight-block stretch, we separated, some of us taking two and a half hours to walk just 14 blocks! Among the last to finish – and by this point it was hot – were Ramona Tepper and myself, and I wonder if the extended summer heat affected our choice of subjects:

Thirst

I had come with a microscope
yearning to get to the core
of the colors of town
and of morning

to dissect
each pebble of stucco
its tiny round mouth
drinking whitewash that blinded

to register warmth in adobe
without even touching it
locate the blades of straw dancing all angles
askew through the mortar
and keep my hands clean
of the mud that sucked color from fallen red rocks
gently fading to coral
a pottery reef
in the mountainous surf
I wanted to understand masonry
timeless and velvety grey
like the fur of a burro just born
to figure out lime green
a burst through this light
wrapping storefronts in glaze
like fresh mint
or mojito

the cocktail of pigments
had dizzied me
told me
to pitch my cold instrument into the heat

I was hungry
for something I couldn't describe
all this brilliance
too early
for so much to drink

– Ramona Tepper

Looking for Water

Discarded mattresses slump over an abandoned dryer outside Mitchell's, a former gas station in the heart of a town where everything is formerly something, everything used or antique – farm equipment, buildings, guitars.

Creed Taylor, Texas Ranger, and wife Blanch remain immortalized in brick on a Holland Street sidewalk outside the Rail Road Park. Drought-tolerant fountains of cacti fade in sunlight. Empty and corroded letters prove the Alpine Lumber Company has been long-gone.

A train chugs behind Harry's Tinaja, its ditch as dry as the skulls that decorate it – no water at this watering hole – then a clang-clang-clang and Spriggs Boot & Saddle Shop, selling everything from biker gear to books, whatever it takes to stay in business. A horse trailer ambles by with more occupants than the many houses for sale – reduced.

A peeling red and white sign welcomes visitors to the Bien Venido, and a woman loads Deer Chow into her pick-up at the Exxon. Too early for Twin Peaks Liquor to be open, where no doubt they do have the best selection West of the Pecos. Outside another former gas station, now a wood-work shop – also for sale – a rock fountain with the thinnest dribble of rusty water.

August edges in,
pledges more dust,
desert willows wither

– Scott Wiggerman

In the end, my own poem took the form of a haibun, a Japanese cross between prose and poetry, while poet Leah Billingsley's playful poem took on some of the characteristics of a ghazal, an Arabic form which repeats phrases throughout its couplets:

Alpine

Notebook open, pen poised, which way to go.
blank page, no word signs yet or number signs

Arrows point north and south. Oleander, pickup trucks.
topaz sky, white sign, blue sign

Manicured nails. Handlebar mustache. Mailbox talk.
take your time, purple sign, orange sign

Cowboy pointillist. Christ, the way? Truth-bleached bones.
faded sign, graffiti divine, painted sign

Boot and saddle join. Sonic design. Diminished chord chimes.
brown sign, solar shine, red and yellow sign

Sunflower crimson memories. Yellow door opens. Watch out.
red sign, sign of life, stop sign

Cheshire cat smiles his silver history. Widow-woman shoots.
Signal time.
yesteryear sign, cinnabar mine, black sign

Gunville vacant. Lush sweet peas. Grass. For sale.
green sign, railway line, empty sign

Little red caboose comes rolling down the tracks. You remember the words.
all in time, back again, future-is-here sign

– Leah Billingsley

By the time we regrouped at the Bread & Breakfast, we were ready for water, caffeine and breakfast – but we felt we had our sustenance already. The walking Petrarchan sonnet exercise will be in my bag of tricks from now on, so if you see a strange group of people ambling and writing furiously up and down Holland Avenue this summer, you'll know what's up... the poets are back in town.

Trans-Pecos TRIVIA
by Charles Angell

Geology of the Trans-Pecos

1) Santa Elena Canyon is considered one of the most beautiful sites in Big Bend National Park, with it's 1,500-foot cliff walls composed of alternating layers of Santa Elena limestone, Sue Peaks Formation limestone and Del Carmen limestone. Where else in the region can exposed Del Carmen Limestone be seen?

a) Candelaria
b) Valentine
c) Shafter
d) Plata

2) The Guadalupe Mountains are part of an ancient marine fossil reef, the 400-mile long horseshoe-shaped Capitan Reef. What mountain/mountains in Brewster County are an exposed portion of this fossil reef?

a) Cathedral Mountain
b) Chisos Mountains
c) Santiago Mountains
d) Glass Mountains

3) What mountain range/chain is considered the largest contained entirely in Texas?

a) Chinati Mountains
b) Sierra del Carmen
c) Davis Mountains
d) Bofecillos Mountains

4) Big Bend Ranch State Park features the Solitario, an ancient collapsed volcanic dome. The southwest section of the dome has large faces of exposed limestone that form what are known as "triangular hogbacks." What is this section commonly called?

a) Tres Papalotes
b) The Flatirons
c) Blue Range
d) Paso al Solitario

5) The mountains in the Marathon Basin region are exposed portions of the Ouchita Fold Belt, which also manifests itself in what other states?

a) Arkansas and Oklahoma
b) Colorado and New Mexico
c) Florida and Alaska
d) Louisiana and Mississippi

Bonus: What answer listed above contains the prominent feature sometimes referred to as Shot or Schott Tower?

Answers: 1-C, 2-D, 3-C, 4-B, 5-A, **Bonus:** 3-B

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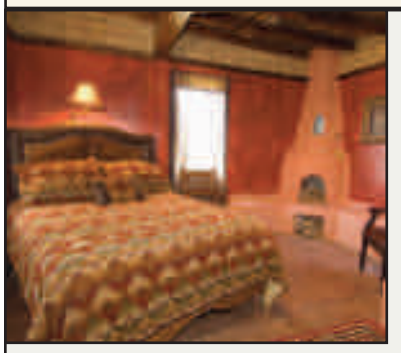

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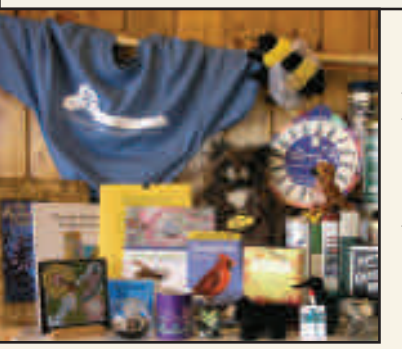

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