



Tall Tales from the Editor

Setting goals or nosebleed

I was standing on top of the world. A king, I felt that day, looking down on the mere mortals below from my perch on top of the 12,500-foot-high Mount Tukuhnikivatz (for those in the know, it's referred to fondly as "Mount Neveracostanza") in the La Sal Mountains in southeast Utah.

This past winter, while prone on the x-ray table being radiated for reoccurring prostate cancer and bemoaning my energy level having been burned away by radiation treatment, I now know what it feels like to move at the breakneck pace of a two-legged banana slug.

I decided to set a goal for myself: Come September, I would be in good enough shape to climb my favorite mountain again.

My climbs are never of the technical type. Why would I want to pack all that equipment up into the nosebleed stratosphere. I pack only the bare essentials. You don't need to know what those essentials are but, rest assured, it's not blow-up dolls, ropes, spurs or green Jell-O, a food group all its own in Utah.

I arranged a rendezvous with the notorious Utah outlaws for this adventure. Some would climb the mighty volcano-looking stone mountain; those who weren't able to would keep the citizens below terrorized for their entertainment—at least in their minds.

There was Al "El Supremo" McLeod, the elder statesman from the land of Mo (Utah). Germans tip their hats to him when meeting him on trails in the middle of nowhere, and women have been known to throw themselves at his feet wherever he travels. Al's career as a county commissioner ended only due to term limits, one of the few good laws on the books in Utah.

Also part of this questionable group was punk rocker Ricky Lee Costanza (who has broken most of the laws written in the Book of Utah). From the dark recesses of his one remaining brain cell came his band, The Plutoniums, which sprang to life in the underground music scene in bustling Cisco, Utah. You might remember his songs, "Sphincter Yo-Yo" and "Miracle Whip Sliders."

J. Michael Pearce, formerly of the J. Michael Pearce Band was there, too. He's working on his comeback with original songs like "Your love is like a prickly pear

cactus spine in my butt." We'll see how that catches on. Michael, a renowned photographer and formally educated geologist, was forced into the decadent world of rock and roll with the help of a couple of his Utah outlaw buds. He and I shared the stage and many other things in years past.

Upon arrival, Chris "Madman" Allen, with whom I have climbed Mount Neveracostanza several times in the past, said, "We don't need no stinkin' oxygen bottles, porters or base camp for this climb, but body bags might be in order." On a previous climb in the late 1970s, we were 50 or 60 feet from the saddle between Mount Mellenthin and Mount Peale (our

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destination was Mount Neveracostanza) when an electrical hail storm blew in on us. The hail quickly piled up to three inches or so while we were out on the slide rock. Lightning was flashing with deafening thunder all around us as we scrambled down the wet, slick rock. Since the next tallest thing after us was rock lichen, we needed to find a hideout—and quick. Why we weren't struck by lightning is one of those wonders you always wonder about. Chris and I have had many of those wonders over the years.

To the rescue was Doo Doo the Wonder Dog (who made this climb five times). He quickly found a crevice in the rock into which he disappeared. It took a minute to convince Doo Doo to let us in—he was growling at us to find our own shelter, but Chris and I managed to squeeze into the oh-so-tight crevice, albeit in very compromising positions. That outing was a lost opportunity for natural selection at its finest.

From this mountaintop, a green island in the middle of the red rock desert, is one of the most spectacular views I've ever seen. To the north lie a half dozen other peaks with names like Haystack, Mineral, and Horse Mountain. Down through the Pinhook Battleground (cowboys vs. Indians—Indians won) lies Castle Valley painted in various reds, but scarred with five-acre ranchettes. Then

there's the Colorado River Canyon; Arches National Park, a landscape befitting dinosaurs; and onto the Book Cliffs. To the west is Spanish Valley, a slum of 1970 single-wides, 5,000-square-foot atrocities, tumbleweeds, puncture vines, blow sand, and Casa de El Supremo. (We all have different tastes.) Dead Horse Point and the Anticline Overlook are everything the Grand Canyon isn't. The Henry Mountains in the far distance claim the only free-roaming buffalo herd in the country. To the south, more canyon lands, mesas, dead-end mazes, the Blue Mountains, sheep, hogans, dead pickup trucks, and the Navajo Nation.

To the east is Colorado, where I can see my favorite rock formation, "The Empty Ripple Bottle" (otherwise known as "Sleeping Ute Mountain"). According to a Ute Indian who befriended me at the Lrae Bar (named after the owner and bartender Earl who cleverly spelled his name backwards) in Moab, Utah, several decades ago, Indian legend has it that one day the bottle will refill and drive the white man out. Looks like a long wait. One also can spot Paradox Valley, a collapsed salt dome, and the Dolores River. Farther out is Naturita (called "Nasty Rita" by some), home of the infamous Incline Bar. Even farther out is the town of Telluride in the San Juan Mountains, once known for wanderers, cowboys, miners and loose women. Now it's Lear Jets, movie stars, facelifts and boring people. My, I've seen a lot of changes in my life. In all directions are hundreds of abandoned uranium mines—a few that Michael, Chris and I worked in. Ah, that explains our glowing personalities.

About this 360-degree view, Michael said, "Today we put the 'A' in awesome." A

much over-used word, but not on that day.

I can't tell you how exhilarating it felt to achieve my goal. (But wait, maybe it was just the lack of oxygen or had other things killed my brain cells?)

Speaking of dead brain cells, why haven't congress and the president set a goal to end their drunken, irresponsible, manic, deficit spending spree? They must think that entitlements are endless even when Fort Knox is depleted. But when politicians sell their votes to everyone from Wall Street gangsters to welfare communities, deficits are what you get.

I think it's way past time to fire the whole lot and start anew. Do millionaire congress folks get unemployment when they're sent to federal prisons (not those country club ones they've set up for their buddies)?

With every spending cut that does come up, there's a choir to sing "No, no, no, not mine! It will be the end of the world if you cut my program." So like a junkie, the country sinks further into our spending addiction. If there is no tough love from congress or the voters' booth, we will slide further down the path to becoming a bankrupt banana republic, answering "Yes, sir," to all of Communist China's whims. Why? They keep financing our debt. Maybe they already own us—do we know?

Here's a goal: a deficit-free America, because you're really free only when you're not shackled with debt.



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This bundle of fun is a Boxer/Border Collie



Mr. Nice Guy #K1523
He's waiting patiently for you to bring him home.



Summer - #K1688
Summer is all about fun with your family.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR
FROM THE EDITOR**



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