



FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY REX ZIAK

KEWPIE ZIAK

THE ENVIRONMENTALIST LOGGER

INTERVIEW BY STUDS TERKEL

Studs Terkel interviewed Bob 'Kewpie' Ziak in 1980, ten years before Kewpie's death in the summer of 1990. The following interview appeared in Terkel's book, *American Dreams: Lost & Found*, published in 1981 by Pantheon Books.

Kewpie Ziak, who was born in 1917 and fought in World War 2, was a rare and singular man. He was inspiringly eloquent with a good humored lilt to his basso voice. He could be as scathing or as oratorical as a Roman senator. He was a man of the woods who was legendary for his courage and protection of wildlife. He created a sanctuary for birds and animals along the Columbia River and risked his life to defend eagles and their nest trees, almost single-handedly forcing timber companies to stop cutting the trees. He protected salmon spawning grounds from the depredations of a mining company and helped stop construction of an aluminum smelter that would have grossly polluted the lower Columbia estuary. He hunted bear hunters with fists and guns. He was nationally known as 'The Environmentalist Logger' for his practices of sustainable logging and

reforesting timber on his land near Knappa. He thought in terms of centuries, expressed through the cycles of his beloved forest. History might regard his legacy as lasting.

I knew who Kewpie was long before I met him, and for the last five years of his life I saw him once or twice a week, usually in an Astoria coffee place where he talked to everybody and genially reparteed with the hired help (he often brought flowers and chocolates for the waitresses). He treated everyone the same, friend and foe, stranger and kin — straight in the eye and never mincing his words or passion, although he tempered his profundity with fellowship and humor.

Something he said to Studs Terkel might just be his own metaphor: "Before I die, I'd like to hear the howl of timber wolves that used to exist here in our woods." His howl is greatly missed and needed now more than ever.

Read this with the thunder of his barrel deep voice in your ear; even when he spoke quietly he rumbled like a storm over a nearby hill.

~MPMc

We're in logging country: Knappa, Oregon. It is near the mouth of the Columbia River.

He's a chunky, muscular man, built along the lines of Hack Wilson, the old Chicago Cubs slugger. He is 62.

Enthusiastically, he talks of "the vast coniferous forest. You're always aware of the scent of trees if you're a logger. It turns you on. You know you've struck a cedar that may have been buried in the ground for a couple of hundred years."

The beauty is going. The old timber that was majestic has been eliminated. In the old days, the Douglas fir was mixed through with Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and the great cedars. All through the woods, you found a beautiful mix of trees. Today, trees are planted in pre-determined distances apart. It is something to be controlled.

The forest to me is an awesome and beautiful place. You see this little baby elk that we have in the woods here? Isn't it a little beautiful cuddly thing? But watch that elk grow, and eventually he becomes a magnificent bull, with a huge rack of antlers, a deep chest, and proud eyes. He's not cute and cuddly anymore. He is awesome. That is the way it is with trees. You see cute little Christmas trees you'll put on the table. They're immature little things. They have not attained the magnificence that nature puts on these trees at 500 years. They take on character. They're always in a battle. The wind's after them, the lightning's after them...

The timber companies don't want a single tree standing any more. They don't understand that a tree, a snag, is not only a hotel for birds and bats and bees. They are magnificent works of art created by nature and beyond the ability of man to equal. There's a tree down the road here a few miles that's over ten feet in diameter at the butt. At the very tiptop of it is a magnifi-

cent crown of jewels: a nest of bald-headed eagles. Timber companies are indifferent to your feelings. I don't think they have any feeling for beauty, for something that is old. The only feeling they want is the tons of pulp to come out of there.

Today, when they come to a canyon, they start switch-backing, criss-crossing back and forth with bulldozers, tearing up the ground, silting the creeks, and putting 5 acres of ground out of production per mile of road. Old-time loggers were not able to reach many of the rough places, so these patches and trees were left. The younger loggers were not here to see what there was before. If you've never known something, it's difficult to appreciate what has been lost.

I was born and lived here in a logging camp. My dad was a logger. He was a big, rawboned, powerful man of a very happy nature. (Softly) I can see him coming home now with his logging clothes on, a rifle in his hand and a deer on his back. The first sounds I can remember are the voices of loggers and the sounds of locomotives and (steam) donkeys. As a kid, it seemed to me more plentiful of everything. The forests were still virgin. There were fish in the sloughs, lots of water-fowl, and it was a very happy time. No one can grow up here and not be aware of the birds and animals and the river. It gets in your blood, in your thinking, in your way of life.

THE OLD WARRIOR DIES

BY HOWARD BRUNER

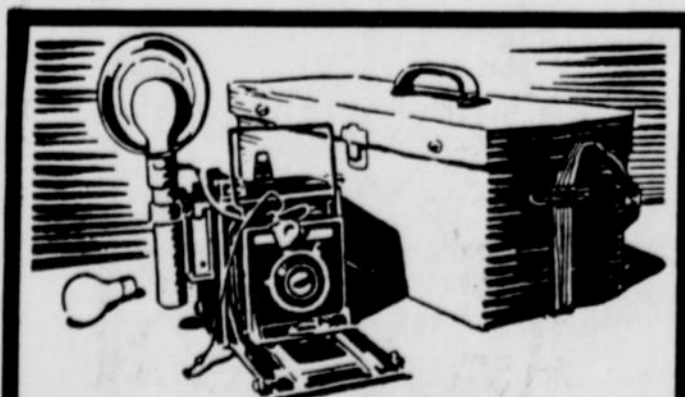
Bob Ziak was a man's man, a two-fisted barrel-chested warrior who contained elements so anomalous he disarmed his opponents through sheer amazement. His arsenal contained guns, fists, heavy machinery and poetry. A visionary in Can't Bust 'Ems and Hickory, Kewpie had reached a stage of development far beyond the norm for this woody resource dependent area. He had gone to the well and found that his life was inextricably wound up with the lives of the creatures and land around him. Perhaps he had caught a glimpse of the place we really are in the scheme of things. He had made the ultimate jump of faith in his denial of free agency without consequences. He accepted the responsibility we god-like humans have for all other forms of life.

This hard living, rough and tumble logger was also a gentle and nurturing force in the hundreds of thousands of lives he touched. By setting up and maintaining a sanctuary for game birds in this world-class mecca for fowl hunters, he had more of an effect on the fortunes of dwindling avian populations than will ever be accountable. Long before the counters and oglers put new value on the natural wonder of a goose 'V', Kewpie had adopted his feathered brothers and sisters. When the call was made to cut the nest trees of the eagles, he was the man who put his body between further life and the ultimate desolation of an eagleless sanctuary. The bear of these woods had one voice speaking for them: Kewpie refused to let the high-tech, dog-enhanced slaughter go unchallenged and stood his ground against all comers. His was a bravery and commitment the likes of which we will probably never see again.

I always had a thrill of anticipation when my travels took me to his magnificent sanctuary. For I was sure to see upwards of thirty species of birds from passerines (songbirds) to raptors. Depending on the season and weather a cast of hundreds was always to be enjoyed. And if one was lucky the man on the tractor, seeing a disciple from his white farmhouse on the hill would come down to do that which has almost gone the way of extinction; he would come down to pass the time of day. I can recall many times when I found myself transported out of the daily stress/performance cycle, having a conversation that was the ultimate in entertainment and relaxation. For Kewpie had that aura of one who was at peace with himself, and although more often than not our subject was centered on those who were less inclined to see the paradise factor in life on this earth, he had the gentle confidence of one who sees past all earthly foibles.

Kewpie is gone. He is wild and free. Never again will I see the tractor with the dog in scoop and the jovial 'mayor' of Brownsmead driving. That is not where I will find Kewpie. I will find him in a scud-torn autumn sky filled with the urgent cries of his brothers and sisters. I will find him in the winded trees of a spring glade, born on the cathartic edge of wildness. He will always be an integral part of that which he loved and helped. That which has now taken his spirit.

Howard Bruner wrote his memoir for the October 1990 issue of the NCTE. He moved later that year from Astoria to Eugene. Like Kewpie Ziak he has fought long and courageously to preserve wildlife and the natural environment.



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