

Someday, somewhere down the road, my young daughters are going to ask me about *Arizona Highways*. One of their questions will be about best memories and proudest moments. I won't have to think about the answer. I already know the answer. "The best part about being editor of *Arizona Highways*," I will tell them, "was Jerry Jacka — working with him, getting to know him and, most importantly, calling him my friend."

I lost my friend last December. I knew it was coming.

"I'm going downhill pretty fast," he told me, just before Thanksgiving. There was sadness in his voice, and brave resignation, but that's not why he called. He'd gotten wind that we were planning a special issue based on his extensive portfolio. "You must be pretty desperate for content down there," he said with humility. And then he laughed — his laugh had the resonance of Santa's "Ho! Ho! Ho!" I guess that's what helped me hold it together. That laugh.

We weren't desperate, of course. The decision to do this issue was made without deliberation. The merit is in our archive. We talk a lot about our Mount Rushmore, and who might be on it. There's never consensus, but one of the four spots always goes to Jerry Jacka, whose work has been appearing in *Arizona Highways* for parts of seven decades.

The first photo we ever published was in July 1958. It was a shot of the Painted Desert, which he'd made on his honeymoon with Lois, his wonderful wife of 64 years. "I look at it now and it was a terrible picture," he'd say. He also called it "god-awful." It wasn't, but in his opinion, it paled in comparison to the shot he'd staged as a kid of a rattlesnake on a cow skull. "I thought *Arizona Highways* would never be able to refuse something like that."

There was another shot he liked, too. "I thought this was so clever," he said. "I laid a couple of beer bottles in the sand and had the snake crawling around them. My title of the picture was *Snakebite Medicine*. I took both of them down to *Highways*, and even though I was just a high school student, [Editor] Ray Carlson was very kind."

And so was Jerry.

One of the first things people will tell you about Jerry Jacka is that he was a gentleman — Marshal Dillon with a Hasselblad. And then they will tell you that he was a storyteller. The best storyteller. I had the privilege of

spending time with Jerry and Lois at their ranch on the Mogollon Rim. We'd sit for hours on the big leather couch in their beautiful home, surrounded by the collected artifacts of their life together. The stories were usually prompted by a random question. "Can you tell me about Jackie Onassis?"

"Oh, that was a great trip," he'd say. "Stewart Udall set it up. We were doing a book on Colorado's route through Arizona. Jackie loved photography, loved writing, and she was an editor for Doubleday. ... She was so down to earth."

The ellipsis in that sentence, the one above, represents the rest of the story, probably a thousand words or more. Even if you asked Jerry about scrambled eggs or paper towel, he could go

on for an hour. It was wonderful to hear him talk. And best of all, his laugh was woven into every story, and every story was told in tandem with Lois.

Although she wasn't with him on every photo shoot, she was there for most of them, which made his stories even better. While he'd hold court, she'd sit back quietly, waiting for her cue.

Jerry: "In the spring of 1973, we hiked down to White House Ruin ..."

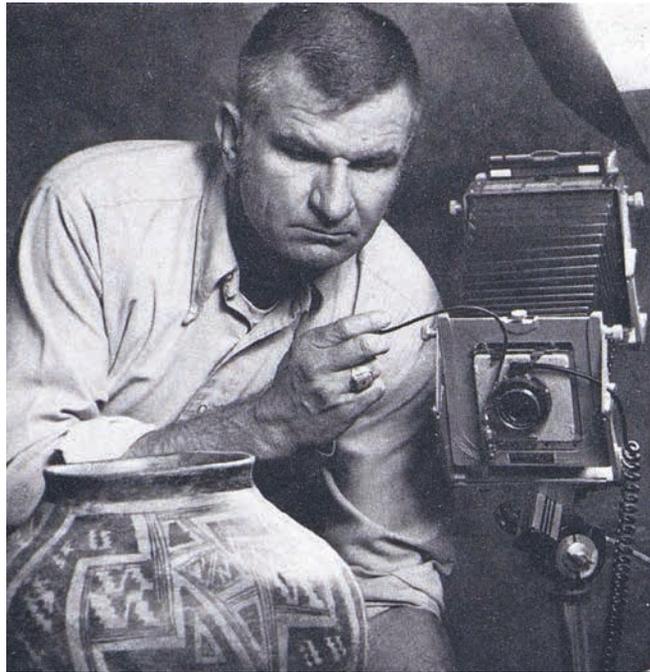
Lois: "That was later, 1974."

She was subtle, and always respectful, but the writer in her was compelled to keep the record straight. Her memory is like a bear trap, but his was impressive, too. Every time I left the ranch, I'd go home and start

fact-checking. *Huh*, I'd think. *He was right. That shot of the agave really was on the back cover of February 1963.*

He remembered things as if they'd happened yesterday, and he could talk to anyone, even drop-ins he'd just met. I learned that last fall.

I'd been in the White Mountains with my friend Ali Goldwater. We started talking about Jerry, and she asked if we could stop by and meet him. She was hoping to hear some stories about her grandfather, and she did. Turns out, it was Barry Goldwater who introduced Jerry to Navajoland. Jerry told the story, beautifully, but then



Self-portrait, 1974

# ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

APRIL 2018 VOL. 94 NO. 4

800-543-5432

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veered off in some other direction. It didn't matter, though. Like everyone else, Ali was captivated by her host, and she soon forgot all about her grandfather.

The next time I saw Jerry — the last time I would ever see him — was a few weeks later, in mid-November. Kelly Vaughn, Jeff Kida and I had decided to make a road trip. Before we left, I stopped at Trader Joe's and picked up a Kringle. If you're not familiar, Kringle is a Danish pastry made exclusively in this country by a bakery in my home state of Wisconsin. As a boy, it was ambrosia. Here's why: Each Kringle, which takes three days to make, features 36 layers of flaky-thin dough, fresh fruit and buttery icing. I'm not sure why I decided to take it along. I guess I didn't want Lois to feel like she had to whip something together, which she would have. And I wanted to share something from my life with Jerry.

He was on his third or fourth story before the Kringle came out. I watched him take his first bite. He savored it, the way a sous-chef might savor a spoonful of pomodoro sauce. And he savored each subsequent bite, as he continued to talk. Eventually, the stories shifted to Jerry's love of music, and his own musical talents. He learned to play the accordion when he was 4, and he kept on playing, masterfully. He told us stories about his band and the records he'd recorded. And then, after some prompting, he pulled out one of those records, which had been loaded onto a CD. He was still eating Kringle when he picked up a boombox with his sharecropper hands. As soon as he hit play, you could see him drift off. To some honky-tonk somewhere. Or his boyhood home in the Sonoran Desert. He closed his eyes, leaned back and smiled. He was still talking — he was always talking — but you could see that he was reminiscing about some other time and place.

If my daughters ever ask me about the most indelible memory I have of Jerry Jacka, that will be it. I'll never forget the rapture I saw in his face when he played his music and ate my Kringle — shared elements of our respective pasts. I'm so grateful for that memory, and for all of the time I spent with Jerry. I just wish we'd had the foresight to publish this issue a few months earlier, so that Jerry could have seen it. Of course, even if we had, he would have laughed and made another joke about us being desperate. Somewhere in that humility, though, I think he might have felt some pride, too.

Jerry liked to tell a story about Joe Stacey, our editor in the early 1970s. By all accounts, Mr. Stacey was surly and hypercritical — the kind of guy who intimidated most solicitors. But Jerry was determined. "I was trying to get a foot in the door," Jerry would say with just a hint of pride. "So I went down there with some pictures and an idea about prehistoric pottery. He didn't make any promises, but Joe encouraged me to pursue it, at my own expense. That's when he said: 'Jerry, I'll put you on stage. It's up to you to perform.'"

As you're about to see, he met the challenge — his performance as a husband, father, friend and photographer was second to none. He was, simply, the best. Sadly, Jerry's shoes cannot be filled, but his legacy will live on in the pages of this magazine and in the lives of those he touched.

So long, my friend. I hope there's a nice accordion up there.

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Arizona Highways® (ISSN 0004-1521) is published monthly by the Arizona Department of Transportation. Subscription price: \$54 a year in the U.S., \$44 outside the U.S. Single copy: \$4.99 U.S. Call 800-543-5432. Subscription correspondence and change of address information: Arizona Highways, P.O. Box 8521, Big Sandy, TX 75755-8521. Periodic postage paid at Phoenix, AZ, and at additional mailing offices. CANADA POST INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATION MAIL PRODUCT (CANADIAN DISTRIBUTION) SALES AGREEMENT NO. 40732015. SEND RETURNS TO QUANTIGRAPHICS, P.O. BOX 456, NIAGARA FALLS ON L2E 6V2. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Arizona Highways, P.O. Box 8521, Big Sandy, TX 75755-8521. Copyright © 2018 by the Arizona Department of Transportation. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. The magazine does not accept and is not responsible for unsolicited materials.





“kirts up, zippers down.” That’s one of the first things you learn on the river. Most of what you need to know is spelled out at orientation, the night before. But where to pee, that’s something you learn when the time comes. Women go upstream, men go downstream, modesty goes out the window. At first you think you’ll never get used to it. After a

few times, though, it’s just part of the routine. Everything about rafting the Colorado is routine. It’s a sequence of repeated actions, whether it’s standing downstream, shooting the rapids, setting up camp or sleeping under the stars.

A year ago this month, I made my first trip down the river. It was a long time coming — I’d been to the Grand Canyon 126 times before I finally strapped on a life jacket. The only ratio worse than mine was that of the legendary photographer Josef Muench. He’d been to the Canyon more than 150 times before his first river trip. I used to take some comfort in that shared futility. Until a few weeks ago, when his son, David, told me that his father was afraid of water. *A legitimate excuse*, I thought. *Dang. So much for solidarity.*

In April 1965, we published a story about Mr. Muench’s trip. The photos were his, of course. He also got the byline, which came with a parenthetical note: “By Josef Muench (as told to Joyce Rockwood Muench).” The words are unmistakably hers — Mrs. Muench is among the best writers we’ve ever featured — but he took the notes, and together they captured the essence of running the river at a time when commercial rafting was still in its infancy.

This month, we’re rerunning the piece. Although it’s more than 50 years old, it’s still so good. And, in many ways, the experience is still the same. The red Hakatai, the tall tales about the old boatmen, the thrill of running Lava Falls ... none of that has changed. The need for an enthusiastic guide is the same, too. It’s the difference between a good trip and the trip of a lifetime. Mr. Muench had Georgie White, a colorful pioneer who was described by *Life* magazine as a “new kind of iron-nerve mermaid.” My guides were Somer Morris and Fred Thevenin. They’re colorful, too. And second to none.

On paper, Freddie is Somer’s boss — he owns Arizona Raft Adventures with his wife, Alexandra. On this trip, however, Somer was in charge. She was tasked with getting 13 of us from Lees Ferry to Diamond Creek, and maybe changing our lives along the way. I knew only a few of the crew before we launched, but you bond quickly on the river, and before you know it, you’re body-surfing the rapids of the Little Colorado with an intrepid 75-year-old named Sheila — we hit the choppy water like a two-man bobsled team. She was amazing, and so was her husband, Allen. Curious and kind, he was one of my downstream mates, along with Sam, David, Gary, Steve, Rich and Brett. Upstream with Sheila were Ann, Martha, Patrice and Susan Schroeder.

Susan is the CEO of the Grand Canyon Association, which was hosting our trip. As the official nonprofit partner of Grand Canyon National Park, GCA does all kinds of important work, including a project that helps Native Americans reconnect with the Canyon. One place where that occurs is Deer Creek, a narrow side canyon that’s culturally significant and sacred to the Southern Paiutes. We hit Deer Creek on Day 5. Most people will tell you it’s one of the best stops on the river. I think it’s *the* best. You’ll see why inside.

Our camp that night was just above Doris Rapid. By the time we pulled in — after so many days on the river — we’d mastered the routine of setting up camp, which begins the instant the raft hits the beach. The first thing that happens is a footrace to claim the best campsites. It’s a polite free-for-all. Then it’s back to the boat, where an assembly line is formed and almost everything on board gets shifted to the sand — dry bags, sleeping bags, cots, camp chairs, propane tanks, water tanks, grills, coolers and the groover (Google it). It’s just enough work to justify happy hour, which is kept in a burlap sack that gets dragged behind the raft in the 42-degree water. Cold is a commodity on the river.

As you might expect, the Guinness segues into dinner, which is something I’ll never quite understand. Somehow, every night, Somer, who looks like a 20-year-old version of the young girl in *Jurassic Park*, and Freddie, who’s a combination of Woody Harrelson, Jeff Bridges and Andy Rooney’s eyebrows, would roll out a feast. Somewhere in the bottom of that raft, I guess, was a Whole Foods. I don’t eat that well in the fifth-largest city in America. The only thing in camp that’s better than mealtime is bedtime. After the sensory wallop of floating all day through a billion years of geology (see this month’s portfolio), eating like an emperor and knocking back a beer or two, the denouement is sleeping under the stars.

Below the rim, the Big Dipper drops in like a spaceship over an Iowa cornfield. And there’s no sound but the sound of the water. It’s hard to stay awake, but every night I’d try, because I didn’t want the day to end. I don’t think I ever made it more than 20 minutes, but what a place to crash. Like standing downstream with a bunch of strangers, it’s a routine you can get used to.

ROBERT STIEVE, EDITOR

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## I can't remember where we

got our pumpkins. That's not something we grew on the farm. Most likely, they came from a roadside stand somewhere. They were everywhere. Self-serve card tables heaped with produce. Hand-painted signs. Capitalism based

on the honor system. I'm guessing we paid about a buck apiece — it was the '60s and early '70s — and drove away feeling like philanthropists. "Highway robbery!" That's what my grandfather would have called it. But it was money well spent, because Halloween was an adolescent bender. Mardi Gras for kids too young to drive.

Whether or not it's possible to warp the fabric of existence, I can go back in time whenever I want. I just close my eyes and I'm back in the backyard of my boyhood home. Carving pumpkins with my brothers, dive-bombing mounds of maple leaves, pretending to be Bart Starr. Or Roman Gabriel. The October air was crisp — it would frost the pumpkins overnight. And it smelled like fall. Some combination of wood smoke, corn shocks and the ironic redolence of decomposition.

So many of my best memories are linked to autumn. Winter in Wisconsin was cold. Spring was wet. Summer was buggy. But fall was picture-perfect. The valedictorian of the class. It's the same in Arizona, even though our state is often disparaged as a place with no seasonal personality. It's true that the change in the desert is more subtle, but there's a definite transition that marks the end of summer and the beginning of fall. In the high country, it's easier to see, but it's everywhere, and that's what makes Arizona so unique. And maybe better than anywhere else.

A few years ago, we caused a stir after teasing that theory on our cover. Turns out, some folks in Vermont — *all 623,657 of them* — weren't crazy about the cover line: "Autumn in Arizona & Why It's Better Here Than It Is in Vermont." Among the many calls I took was one from the governor's office in Montpelier. I think that's what got the attention of the Associated Press. After that, the story went viral. Even *Time* magazine weighed in: "It's a leaf-peeping smackdown. A magazine promoting tourism in Arizona (yes, Arizona) is boasting that its foliage season is better than Vermont's."

The best response, though, came from our former colleagues at *Vermont Life*, which was one of the great regional travel magazines in the country — sadly, they shut down in May after 72 years of preeminence. To their credit, they counterpunched with a mocked-up cover about one of their state's scenic wonders. The cover line read: "Gorges in Vermont & Why Quechee Gorge Is Grander Than the Grand Canyon." It was a brilliant tongue-in-cheek comeback to a feud that never really was.

Our theory was never about quality, but rather quantity. If you do the math, the peak season for fall color in Vermont runs for about three weeks. In Arizona, it goes on for more than four months, beginning on the North Rim in

September and ending as late as January in some of the desert's riparian areas. Sprint. Marathon. Take your pick. We'll admit that Vermont is the crown jewel, but as Joyce Rockwood Muench wrote in our October 1957 issue, Arizona's palette is pretty impressive, too.

"Paved highways and their less sophisticated relatives take you unerringly into these frontiers of color," she explained with her own burst of color. "You can scarcely travel east or west, north or south, without being caught in the rolling tide of prismatic changes. Whether it's along the winding blacktop over the Kaibab: a fifty-mile cavalcade of green and gold in Northern Arizona; down the escalator-drop of 7,000 feet in fifty miles through the movie-backdrop of Oak Creek Canyon; or whisking up to the Alpine resort in the Hualapais ... vistas of foliage can be caught in the very act of changing costume. Navajo Mountain, deep in the Indian country; the rolling ups and downs of the White Mountains; the unforgettable San Francisco Peaks; the Blues; Sierra Anchas; Santa Catalinas crowd the roster. You can include the Ajos, the Grahams and the Chiricahuas, and still be leaving out invitations to keep you moving along the trails to autumn tints."

Although our issue this month is focused on ghost towns, every one of which is well suited to a visit in October, we do offer some guidance on where to see fall color. Our *Hike of the Month* features two trails in the Red Rock-Secret Mountain Wilderness near Sedona. There's a lot of color in there. Mostly red. And our *Scenic Drive*, which ultimately leads to Mount Hopkins, also winds along Montosa Canyon, where, at the end of the month, the cottonwoods will be draped in gold, like Louis XI at Plessis-les-Tours. In addition, our *Fall Color Guide* gives specifics on some of the places Ms. Muench mentioned in 1957, along with a few others. There are 17 in all, and we think they're all worth a look.

Of course, we also thought it was a good idea to start a war of words with the state of Vermont. Five years later, we'll tip our hat to the Green Mountain State and wish you well as you make a plan to explore autumn in Arizona. It's going to take some time. Meanwhile, happy Halloween. Here's hoping you find pumpkins for a buck apiece. There has to be a roadside stand out there somewhere.

ROBERT STIEVE, EDITOR

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