



Tall Tales from the Editor

A grave situation or Perfecting our craft

The second summer that I had been employed by the U.S. Forest Service to run their soils lab on the La Sal Mountains in southeast Utah had come to an end. I had spent those days baking soil in an old pizza oven or running aggregate through a shaker machine. I was then required to write up reports on these materials that were used to build yet another government road to nowhere. Of course it was at the taxpayers' expense.

When work was slow in the soils lab (a small single-wide trailer) I'd fill in on the all-girl survey crew. Oh yes, that was a crew from heaven...but that's another story! I most definitely planned to return to this job the following summer. I preferred seasonal work, which left me most of the fall, all of the winter, and part of the spring to hike around in Utah's red rock canyon country, or to start yet another rock and roll band.

I figured if one had to work, what better job could there be than seasonal work with the U.S. Forest Service. I loved getting paid to gaze upon the La Sal Mountains and in particular, Mount Tukuhiuats, a very steep volcano-looking cone that I had climbed a half dozen times. Tukuhiuats is a Ute Indian word meaning "Where the sun lingers." How do we know that's really what it means? If I had been a Ute running around in that magical mind-altering country—land of red rock canyons, arches, balanced rocks, the Colorado, Green, and Dolores Rivers, Dark Canyon Lake, the Book Cliffs, Fisher Valley, Castle Valley, Sinbad Valley, Paradox Valley, and the Moab Valley, I would not have told the people who forcibly moved me to a teeny tiny reservation the true meaning of any of my native language! Maybe Tukuhiuats really means "Translucent whites with butt breath" or "White-man, may you lose control of your sphincter muscle." Had I been giving the name to my conquerors that's what the word for the mountain peak would have meant, but then I'm not a Ute.

I had been unemployed for a couple of months (something that never struck me as a horrible stroke of bad luck), when my good friend and old band-mate, from the band Shalako, Steve Olschewski called me. He said he had the maintenance job for the Grand County Cemetery district. Steve then offered me a part-time job for a month or so, to help him get the cemetery pruned and cleaned up. I asked, "Will we be digging any graves?" Steve said we would, so I signed on. I thought "gravedigger" would be an outstanding addition to my long work resume, which included such jobs as long-hole prober, make-believe patient for medical student proctologist, unknown rock star, etc. I had access to free flowers for my weekend dates. I did have to

remember, though, to remove "We'll miss you grandma" from the flower arrangement before presenting it to my date.

While Steve and I worked on getting Moab's old cemetery in order, my pooch, Doo Doo, the wonder dog, entertained himself by marking hundreds of headstones, digging into new grave sites – is that an old deer rib bone that Doo Doo was chewing

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on? Steve was pretty sure it was. Doo Doo developed a disgusting taste for stagnant water in old flower vases during our round of employment at the cemetery. That taste stayed with him for the rest of his life.

Steve was working the backhoe getting the ground ready for a late Friday afternoon funeral. Doo Doo and I were sitting in the cab of the cemetery's old faded green dump truck. The rings in the engine were long gone, and when you fired it up, you were quickly engulfed in a putrid black cloud of carbon. The exhaust system had rusted out a decade ago, so the dump truck sounded like an old Sherman tank on maneuvers. The vinyl seats had sun rotted away years ago, so you sat on some thin seat stuffing with springs poking you in the butt. The tread on the tires looked like a receding hairline that had chromed out, and the brakes were very questionable. The dump truck did sport a new valid safety inspection sticker on its multiple-cracked windshield. Who says it doesn't pay to know somebody?

I hopped out of the idling truck for a much-needed breath of oxygenated air, asking Steve, "Do you think the hole is deep enough?" The arm on the backhoe couldn't extend any deeper into the mini-Grand Canyon that we'd created. I pointed out to Steve that you could not get another boulder into the dump truck, and boulders are what made up the ground that the cemetery sat on. Steve said, "We're just perfecting our craft." We set up the 2 x 8 boards over the grave that would hold the lowering device. I was nervous, as these boards were barley long enough for the width of the grave, allowing only a few inches of over-hang on either side.

When we had the lowering device set up, we then covered everything with bright green artificial turf. No one would be able to see the size of the hole. We hoped, prayed, and placed bets on whether the whole thing would collapse in on itself during the service. "Father, we are gathered here this afternoon to pay our respects"—

KA-BOOM!—followed by screams as everything fell into the hole. Doo Doo, Steve and I would be unemployed, not to mention trauma caused to the family, followed by lawsuits, jail time, and having to drop "gravedigger" from my resume.

We moved the equipment up the hill to the back of the cemetery. From there, we watched as the funeral procession arrived, followed by the service. An hour later, the springs from the dump truck seat were permanently imbedded in our backsides. It was getting late, and it seemed as though the last ten or so folks might be getting ready to camp out. Steve fired up the faded green menacing dump truck with a roar that shook the ground under us. The folks down at the gravesite looked up the hill, noticing for the first time a dump truck loaded with boulders that were rapidly disappearing into a choking black fog. They quickly dispersed to their cars and left the cemetery as we idled down to the gravesite.

I was operating the hand crank of the lowering device, which was dropping the casket further and further into the grave, when suddenly there was no more strap left to lower the coffin. We were still a foot or two from the bottom of the grave. The weight of the coffin was more than the hand crank could lift, so there was no moving it. With excited voices, our conversation was: "I can't believe this!" "What are the odds?"

"Jumpin' Mormon crickets!" "I wish I was at the 66 Club!" "Is there an 800 number on that lowering device that we can call in case of an emergency?" We finally decided that if we could get the coffin to swing end to end in the hole, we might be able to pull one of the straps free. We had her swinging, we managed to free the strap, and with a god-awful crash, the coffin fell free at the head end.

On immediate inspection, the corner was seriously crunched on the coffin. I asked Steve, "Do you think Bob's body shop can fix that?" Steve looked at me and said, "Someone's going to have to get down in the hole and free up the other strap from down there." I quickly added, "And that would be the guy who dug this mini-Grand Canyon!" Into the grave Steve jumped, landing on the coffin lid that once had had a rounded shape to it. His work boots caved in the lid to where I was freaking out that it would open up. From the hole came mutters of "I just can't believe this." Steve hollered up, "When I lift up on the side handle, you pull the strap free!" When he lifted, the handle tore free from the coffin. With Steve holding the handle, I looked down at him and said, "Holy Crap, Steve, the family's coming back!" Steve said, "Help me get out of here!" "No time, Steve! Hide!" I ran off with Doo Doo at my heels. After a few

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PETS OF THE MONTH

		
Gus - #K0741 a handsome 2-year-old with black & white fur.	Larry - #0650 a happy 4-year-old Blue Tic Hound.	Moki - #K1131 a Lilac Point Siamese who's just a year old.
		
Balou - #0480 a cute little Italian Greyhound mix boy.	Chevy - #K0711 a 3-year-old boy with Tabby and white fur.	Ally - #K0818 an energetic girl who'll work for treats.

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