

Clips for John H. Farr

The following three columns are selected from writings for Horse Fly in Taos, New Mexico from 2004 -2006. For more information, contact John at jhfarr@newmex.com or call 505.770.9537.

Message for the Fourth

By John H. Farr
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The last ten miles of rocky trail going down into the canyon took at least an hour, most of it in first gear.

When I got to the primitive campground at the bottom, it was obvious that no one had visited in quite some time. The views of the high canyon walls all around me were breathtaking. I went skinny-dipping in the river and afterwards sat in my chair watching shadows move across the cliffs. There wasn't another human being for miles, and Verizon was dead. I could have fallen out of the sky, tumbled from another era entirely. The only sounds were bird calls and wind in the trees.

I have probably never been so physically alone in my life. Only my wife knew where I was, and she was in Maryland. No one had seen me go into the canyon. I had a book with me and of course my computer, but I didn't want to read or write. I didn't even want to think.

As it turned out, no thoughts came, and I had no visions. I hadn't expected any, but I had thought I might get a little lonesome. I didn't. I was completely at ease and felt no fear. When it got dark, I climbed into bed in the truck and simply went to sleep. I remember waking up a few times, looking out at the moonlight, and marveling that it was so quiet. There was never a thump, a skitter, or a scrape. No bears, no mountain lions. Not even a skunk. It was like camping in a church that had neither a building nor a name. In the isolation of my experience, I felt myself expand and fill the canyon with my spirit. From wall to wall and end to end, there was only me, the rocks, the trees, the birds, a turtle and a garter snake I'd seen down by the river, and flies that buzzed around my lemonade in the sun. As I drifted in and out of sleep, I felt calm and safe as warm clean sand.

The drive home was spectacular but uneventful. Time passed. Eventually I thought some more about the things I'd seen and the fact that something called or pulled me, how I had driven out across the plains with no more goal than simply going there, that I had allowed myself the freedom to explore.

I also remembered the raven.

It happened early on. I was standing on a rock next to a tall Ponderosa pine on the edge of a precipice at the actual entrance to the canyon, watching a raven banking in a tight circle in the stiff wind just above me. I was staring very carefully to make sure I had it pegged, because the bird had made a noise I've never heard a raven make before: it *whistled* at me with a sound very much like the shriek of a hawk, only more full-bodied, longer, and strangely piercing. This didn't make sense: why would a raven, of all things, be whistling at me? I heard the sound again. Just then the raven dived in my direction, descending to land in the pine tree, I assumed, except it kept on coming. It was diving straight at me, and I saw the raven's face front-on. Not with my eyes, however, but with my mind: *instantaneously filling my entire field of vision was the close-up face of the raven, with gleaming black beak and big red eyes!* I ducked, obviously, heard the raven whistle again, and decided not to linger. It was as if the bird had projected an image of its warning face directly into my brain...

Nothing like that has ever happened to me before. And what does America have to do with this? Nothing! Not a blessed, goddamned thing!

Windshield

By John H. Farr

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Tumbling blindly through space toward a bug-splat rendezvous, they come. I came. More will.

"You won't recognize this town," goes the refrain, like a bullet to the brain. Indeed. But Taos is a midge, a gnat. It's not just here, it's everywhere the dingbat cretin white man's heart decides a buck is better than a plaque beside the Pearly

Gates. The collective mind is gone, but on we babble, like Alzheimer's of the species, running on obsolete, corrupted software. We Anglo zombies aren't in this all alone, of course. The Japanese never saw a whale they wouldn't eat, Nambe Pueblo's caved to Vegas, the Chinese think ecology's for girlie-men. Here in Llano, people dump *basura* on the mesa, leave Bud Lite ATV-scat on the trails. (I found a bag today that even had a license plate. That's *traceable*, you know.) So everybody's guilty. It's like we failed the test, and no one cares -- enough to make you rape and steal, loot the store, and cram the chocolates in your mouth before the Big Guy pops your silly watermelon head.

Out in the world, mostly accidental pockets of clarity shimmer in the gloom. Indigenous wisdom accesses the dreamtime. Warriors hold bits of territory free, even in the city. The children know, and some grow up with memory intact. There's something here like that, worth fighting for, that lifts the whole world to another level. I found a piece of it up north last week, along Costilla Creek. If you've never been to Valle Vidal, you probably shouldn't go, at least not just to have a party. But if you're curious and humble, it might just let you in, and you'll be better for it.

This time I went farther up into the mountains than I'd ever gone. I found a dead-end road along a valley where I stayed at least an hour and never saw another soul. There were pine cones in the tops of spruces, where the chickadees went round and round. Bluebirds flitted here and there across the quiet grassy meadow. Birds I didn't recognize went pecking in the creek, and a red-tailed hawk wheeled overhead. It was mostly cloudy, with a little bit of sun, and every now and then a shaft of light would hit the slopes and detonate a yellow aspen. The air was clean and pure. I felt an otherworldly sense of peace up there and didn't want to leave.

As I watched the birds and listened to the water, I had the strongest sensation that they were *happy*. I don't know how else to describe it. Not just in a decent mood, but deeply, firmly, solidly engaged with all around them in the way it ought to be. And then it hit me: this was someplace where *the testing was still on*, a windshield where the eye of God looked out and saw the way was clear. Pedal to the metal, baby. You'd think anyone would understand. Drivin' that train, high on terrain. And air, and water, and all the gifts of creation not yet fouled and lost forever. Right here, right now, uncompromised, exalted.

The methane junkies want to blow it up for good. "New energy sources!" "Progress!" "You can't fight change!" Except it isn't change at all, just more of the same: the old calcified refrain, the babbling of a body left without a mind.

Change would mean we *paid attention to what was in our hearts* instead of selling gas and jerky to roustabouts. Isolation's done the work before, but too few of us to mess things up is just blind luck, not being smart. That's shifting, so if you don't want to fight, go find a beach somewhere. Moving to Taos to retire is like swallowing a live grenade for indigestion, anyway.

Bug-splat city, bug-splat nation, bug-splat world: when the Big Guy can't see out, this buggy's in the ditch.

Yells-At-Nothing

By John H. Farr

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Right there by the little church, the speed humps nearly did him in.

Juan del Llano had been at home for two days straight, but now it was either supper from a jelly jar or make a run to Cid's. Hungrier by the minute, he fired up the truck and rattled into town. As he approached the spot where the road narrowed by the old adobe walls, he barely hit the brakes in time.

Someone had been busy. There where the shoulders disappeared and all sane people slowed down anyway were not one, but TWO brand-new speed humps, less than 50 feet apart, where none had ever been before! The Ford heaved sloppily over the evil black asphalt, instantly rearranging everything in back, while Juan bounced high enough to wish the roof wasn't there. The happiest thing Juan thought as he rounded the curve was that there might not be money for *fixing* the roads, but at least there was plenty for messing them up. And then he found another one.

Juan could hardly believe his eyes: a speed hump *at the bottom of a hill* was a blow to manhood, gravity, and common sense. It was like the terrorists had won. On this third hump the tumbled contents of the pickup bed ricocheted off the sides of the aluminum cap, and the horn honked. Uh-oh.

When Juan drove back up the hill after scoring a hot organic chicken and bread,

the truck honked on every hump: (bonk) HONK! -- (bonk) HONK! — bonk) HONK! The next day it almost happened again, but Juan decided no one would buy the story of a stuck solenoid and a loose ground wire, though he almost believed it himself. No, he would forever be known as The Man Who Honks, with all the honors accruing thereto. It would be like The Man Who Yells at My Dogs, and possibly just as exciting.

The road theater occurred some months earlier, on a cold, damp February afternoon when Juan was already darkly disposed. As the oversize tires splashed sullenly through the adobe slop, the neighborhood canine kamikazes came barreling out of the sagebrush, bent on glorious self-destruction or holy performance art. While the little black and white one ran back and forth *in front of his wheels*, the humungous white one leaped up against the driver's side window, slobbering and bellowing maniacally. It was all too much for Juan, who lurched to a stop, jumped to the ground, and hurled rocks into the corn snow at the retreating dogs. "GIT! GIT, damn you!" he yelled, and then, "KEEP YOUR [CENSORED] DOGS ON A LEASH!" this last flung more at the heavens than toward anyone within earshot.

But who could ever know, he pondered later? Had that been a scowl of recognition from the face behind the sunglasses glinting from a certain pickup truck? And who wouldn't let dogs run loose across the mesa, especially stoked-up mutts as loony as these? You'd have to turn them out or shoot them just to get a moment's peace, he realized, and maybe never have them in the house at all. Suddenly Juan felt just a little sympathy. Not much, but enough to make him wary of stretching the Code o' the West.

It was similar with him on the Internet. Every morning Juan honked at speed bumps of reasoning or yelled at romping fascist hounds, but the next day the nonsense and the Republicans were still there. He honked and yelled some more, but it made no difference. From the mud at his feet to the farthest reaches of cyberspace, the sheer exuberance of the stupidity that surrounded him was stunning. Juan wondered if he'd given it life. Not created it, necessarily, but tossed slop in the trough, been sucked by vampires, something.

It was time to get simple. Maybe then he would know.

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