TO DRINK FROM PLACES:
UNCOVERING A RICH WAY OF LIFE NEAR THE GRAND CANYON’S
NORTH RIM

By

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ABSTRACT

To Drink from Places: Uncovering a Rich Way Of Life

Near the Grand Canyon’s North Rim

by

Melinda Rich, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2010

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The chapters of this thesis focus on the history and stories of the people who built and traveled down the highways—Highway 89A, Highway 89, and Highway 67—that branch out from the junction in front of Jacob Lake Inn, the Bowman/Rich family’s 87-year-old lodge. The family’s role in building roads, supporting and encouraging the growing tourist industry in Kanab and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, and the converging effects of these choices have created the unique family culture and contributed to the history of the Grand Canyon region over time. Ultimately this thesis is about relationships, about the connections, influences, and choices of individuals, businesses, and government organizations that have created the myriad levels of local and national memory and unique distinctions between the tourist industry on the North and South Rims of the Grand Canyon that have framed my family’s lifestyle at the junction to the National Park and surrounding scenic areas.

(138 pages)
To my ever-expanding family in all the many places you are.
Know you are loved.
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I would like to thank my extended family, my aunts, uncles, cousins, ancestors,
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has a part of the story to share.

Finally, I would like to thank my grandmother, whose memories fill these pages
and who has shown me over the years how important it is to understand why people do
what they do and how they came to be what they are. Our conversations are why I am
writing this thesis.

Melinda Rich
PREFACE

“To Drink From Places”: Uncovering a Rich Way of Life Near the Grand Canyon’s North Rim is my first attempt to unpack the layers of local and family history and memory that have accumulated over the 125 years my extended family has lived and worked in the Grand Canyon region. From the time of their 1885 settlement in Kanab, Utah, my ancestors found themselves at the crossroads of a changing West, entwined with the transition from homesteading and ranching, wagons and horseback to a modern motorized tourist culture. Relatives in the early 1900s helped the town of Kanab transform from a roadless, isolated settlement in Southern Utah into a community able to support automobile travel, road construction, and tourism to the nearby National Parks.

As I began to research and write about my family and the beautiful landscapes we call home, I couldn’t escape the image of these roads. I have framed my narrative around the structure of the roads my family helped build and the roads that bring tourists and travelers to our lodge, Jacob Lake Inn. Our business sits at the junction of two highways, US Route 89A heading north and south, and AZ State Route 67, which leads to the North Rim. The histories of these three branching roadways are interconnected with my family’s experience in the region. Focusing my thesis chapters on these individual roadways allows me to draw connections between the fragments of oral and written family stories, local histories, travel accounts, archival research, and published works.

As I link the road narratives together with my individual perspective traveling down them, snapping photographs as I drive or stop in my usual spots along the roadsides, or view these trails and highways from vantage points I have collected over
time, I hope to show the significant changes these roads brought to this remote region of
the West, to my family, and to me.

Like the highways explored in this thesis, resting on the surface of millions of
years of the geological and human past, my research over the last two years only
scratches the surface of this amazing history. But like my relatives and citizens of Kanab,
I have created my own pathways, junctions, and crossroads in an effort to help me
maneuver through, solidify, and understand my fierce attachment to my family and these
changing places.

I don’t claim that this thesis is the history of the North Rim or even of the region I
describe. It is a record of my migration through our stories. I have laid down my tracks as
I have known how.
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CHAPTER 1

VAGABOND FOR BEAUTY

A life / Is a mirror / Reflecting the road over which it passes.

Sometimes / When it rains / The mirror itself is reflected in the road.

-Everett Ruess

Figure 1. Vermillion Mirror by Melinda Rich. Digital Photograph. 2007.
Beginnings were bred into me, imbedded like a character trait, an allele. And when my parents and three older brothers pulled up in front of my kindergarten class, the sun glinting off the blue glittered surface of our family Suburban, the rust-colored trailer covered in a bulging turquoise tarp, school in Salt Lake City was officially over. That trailer meant my summer at Jacob Lake, my family’s lodge near the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, had begun.

Most kids I knew went home that day, dropped off book bags or lunch boxes and stood in the June sun under the glinting arc of a sprinkler or rode their bikes up and down the heat-dappled streets. But my summers didn’t begin as I imagined theirs did, immediate gratification, a break from lessons and work. As soon as I stepped on the running board and climbed over my brother’s shoulder to my usual spot, in the empty space on top of bags of clothes and coolers of food my parents didn’t want left in the fridge for a summer, we began our migration south.

Our beginnings were gradual, an uphill climb, along Highway 89’s winding route through Utah’s long green valleys and passing spring run-off lakes and reservoirs my parents always oogled at.

“Look at all that water,” my dad said. “Yuba was full and now it looks like Paiute is too,” he added, motioning with his chin out the driver’s side window like the old Navajo men on the reservation do when pointing out the direction of the nearest gas station.

I stared over my feet out the shaded window. The long, dark lake in the distance hugged the mountain. I knew it meant we were close to a river, but I didn’t know its
name. The Sevier winds its way north through purpled volcanic rocks and bright valleys. At that time, I only knew it was where we stopped sometimes and Dad would let us fish.

“Hey, Mom!” I shouted over the hum of rotating tires. “Isn’t that the place Dad took us fishing last year?” I heard Dad chuckle, but Mom didn’t move.

My brother Ben turned his face to me, “I don’t think she heard you. She might be asleep. But that isn’t the place. It’s coming up, watch for the bridge.”

Then I remembered it. The year before we’d pulled off the highway onto dirt, my luggage bed bouncing and shifting over the potholed road. We stopped before the bridge, pulled the fishing poles out of the Suburban’s back window, and I scrambled down the bank to the river’s edge. My brothers stood hanging over the bridge and let their hooks drop to the ripples below. I sat down and sloshed my bare feet in the numbing water, gripping my tiny pole, blue with orange fish swimming along the plastic reel. “Here, honey, let me show you….”

“Did you hear me, Bubs? Good remembering. It was right there,” my mom said smiling back at me. I turned on my side, pulled out of the memory, and followed the line of her pointing finger. There it was, the bridge, cold water, willows in the distance. I had thought she was asleep.

“Remember how the trout made the cooler stink for weeks!” my brother Burke said, laughing and looking up from his book. “We tried to put fruit in it, and the grapes tasted like fish.”

“That stink was on my fingers for longer,” added my oldest brother, Steve, holding his hands away from his face as if he could still smell the memory.
“Sick!” Ben said, shaking his head. I imagined the smell of scales and river slime rising from the cooler below me.

“Can someone please open a window?” I squeaked. Steve pushed the button down and a rush of cool air hit me. I rolled flat on my stomach, outstretched above the heads of my older brothers, the whole inside of the car in my view. Mom and Dad were in front, talking to each other now. They laughed, Mom turned her head toward the window, her profile shining in the glass over the blur of trees and road-cut mountainsides. Dad rubbed his neck and stretched his arm across the seat, his hand on Mom’s shoulder. She smiled to her reflected self.

We dipped into a valley and the air turned chill. I usually fell asleep here in the middle of the trip, sometimes earlier, a learned drowsiness after years of watching the scenery slide through dark windows. But not this time. The cold currents pulled at loose parts of my clothes, my hair flying wild in the wind. I heard one of my flip-flops flap against a taut plastic bag. I didn’t know where the other one was, probably lodged somewhere in the back.

“What is that sound? Is the tarp loose again? I could have sworn I’d roped it tight.” My dad said, a bit annoyed, hesitating for a moment, deciding whether to pull off on the side of the road.

I imagined the tarp flapping behind in the wind, a turquoise bird flying south with us for the summer. I never thought we were “moving” then, leaving a home and friends, the other half of my life left to transform without me in it. We were just driving home to Jacob Lake, passing through the same towns year after year, places that felt like movie sets with staged children on horseback and even a pack of huge, life-like dinosaurs—a
Brontosaurus, T-Rex, Triceratops—all ready to attack the pink concrete Rock Shop in the shape of the Flintstones’ cave. I used to imagine I was one of those children, my bare feet hanging above worn leather stirrups. I would watch from the side of the road, following the faces of kids framed in the window of their cars as they passed through the center of town. I didn’t know then that only sixty years before, my grandmother was one of them.

Figure 2. Jacob Lake Inn Area Map by Jacob Lake Inn. Paper. 2005.
Jacob Lake Inn, my family’s eighty-seven-year-old lodge sits at the junction of two highways, AZ 67 and US 89A. Both of these roads lead to incredible scenery, AZ 67 to the long views of the North Rim of the Grand Canyon and the intimate winding roads and wide meadows of the Kaibab Forest, and 89A to the arid expanse of Houserock Valley and the nearly mile-high Vermillion Cliffs to the south, and north to Fredonia and Kanab and the pasteled distance of the Grand Staircase that surrounds them.

These scenic attractions have fascinated tourists from across the world for more than a hundred years. Tourism at the Grand Canyon began in the 1880s with visitors traveling for days from Flagstaff to reach the South Rim by stagecoach and later by train while tourism had a slower start on the North Rim due to poor road conditions and low-level investment from the United States Government and outside sponsors. But despite the challenges, these beautiful landscapes held an element of attraction for those people who lived in the sphere of their influence. They too were drawn to the beauty.

Although much later than the South Rim, by the 1920s, Kanab, Utah became a hotspot for tourism. The Union Pacific Railroad, the Utah Parks Company, and other local private entities led people on weeklong tours of Zion Canyon, Bryce Canyon, and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Kanab grew with these seasonal travelers, and locals found new ways to support the growing population of tourists. Out of this frenzy of building and expansion, in the summer of 1923, four years after the establishment of Grand Canyon and Zion National Parks, and during the first years of their marriage, my great-grandparents drove a truck loaded with sandwiches, homemade rootbeer and a fifty-gallon barrel of gasoline to the shores of Jacob Lake, a historically significant watering hole on the Kaibab Plateau. They called this move their “experiment,” a test to see if they
could make a living by supporting the gathering crowds of tourists seeking the rugged views of the new North Rim of the Grand Canyon and other nearby National Parks. That summer trial period proved successful, and the once tenuous possibility is now, eighty-six years later, an expanding business that supports my grandmother and almost all of my dad’s brothers and sisters and their families.

Jacob Lake Inn is a crossroads of travel and tourism, a place where ranchers and outdoor enthusiasts, river rafters, Native American artists, Forest Service personnel, foreign and local tourists, traders, truck-drivers, firemen, employees, and my family share cookies and photographs, memories, souvenirs, and stories. Though I haven’t always been aware of it, I have been collecting these local and family narratives throughout my life. The influence of these stories has led me, like so many travelers before, to find some way to record them, to travel down a similar path and relive this history as a way of making the experiences permanent, remembered.

... 

Wallace Stegner writes in American Places that much of the United States was “explored to a considerable extent by people trying to find a way to somewhere else.” Many of the early trails taken or created by trappers and explorers were extensions of animal migratory routes and Native hunting trails. They were not created to transport goods or expand communication, but, as with the old wagon roads of Southern Utah and Northern Arizona, trails went through rivers, climbed over hills, and bent around rock formations. They followed animal trails, Native American hunting trails, and trade routes. Early travelers to the West did not always have the luxury of short cuts but were limited by the speed of their feet or pack animals. Explorers and settlers learned as they moved,
the roads they chose depending on the reliability of water and food sources or the goods they hoped to sell and trade. Trails widened as horses and oxen were hitched to wagons, the change in technology recorded on the ground as they transported people and goods to more distant locations. Their paths were often longer, circuitous, and sometimes more dangerous.

In areas like Southern Utah and Northern Arizona, travel routes at the turn of the twentieth century were described as “only deep-rutted wagon roads, often impassible in bad weather,” leaving towns and communities “isolated and almost inaccessible.” Mail services and other forms of connection had to maneuver around stretches of deep sand and even more treacherous terrain. One mail route followed the Schunesburg Trail, from Kanab to the Zion Canyon, a narrow path that descended a 1000-foot cliff. Later, tiring of years of climbing this route, Joe Hamblin, a local mail carrier, created a system of pulleys that transported the mail up and down the cliff-face without having to hike the winding switchbacks.

Further improvements in technology and communication, like the telegraph, would make some of this individual exertion unnecessary, but still the roads in these areas limited the expansion of merchandising and shipping businesses and stunted the expansion of tourism, the industry which would prove in later years to be much more lucrative for Southern Utah and Northern Arizona’s economies than agriculture and cattle ranching. Not until after the turn of the century and the invention of the automobile would many of these isolated roads be improved and open up the tourist industry to more than just the intrepid adventurer. For many individuals in Kanab, joining the development of these changing roads would define their lives.
Many people who lived in Southern Utah in the early 1900s thought they would never see a road stretching the length of the state south from Salt Lake City. But early tourism advocates, such as my great-great uncle Edwin “Uncle Dee” Woolley, Jr. did not let this dampen their enthusiasm. Considered “the man who more than anyone believed in attracting regional tourism,” Uncle Dee and several Kanab businessmen formed the Grand Canyon Transportation Company (GCTC) in 1903, believing that if they took road development into their own hands they might bolster public support for tourism in the area.

Their organization had many plans for the improvement of roads to and from Kanab, and even supplied the means for building the Bright Angel Trail from the North Rim across the Colorado River to the South Rim, making the first direct route between rims. But Uncle Dee wanted more than a trail. After visiting the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, he wanted to see the expansion of the tourist industry at the North Rim gain governmental support. This enterprise led Uncle Dee to make plans for the first automobile trip to the North Rim. But as Michael Anderson states in Living at the Edge: Explorers, Exploiters, and Settlers of the Grand Canyon Region, as in other remote regions of the West, there were a few problems: “no maps, no automotive roads, no service stations, and few automobiles between [Kanab] and Provo, Utah hundreds of miles north.” He would have to figure out how to get cars and gasoline down south before he could build his road.

But Uncle Dee had vision, and even though it took a while to persuade his nephew, Gordon, in Salt Lake of the possibility of reaching the North Rim from Salt
Lake in one piece, in June of 1909 they solidified their travel plans. Gordon readied his wife, two sons and a daughter, invited friends, and hired a chauffeur, while Uncle Dee purchased gasoline and food for the entire trip. The expedition lasted three days. Wagons carrying the gas and supplies were sent ahead along the route Uncle Dee had been mapping for months previously. Along the way the teamsters filled in mud holes with straw and dirt. On the section of deep sand twenty miles outside of Kanab, the travelers stretched a “heavy tarpaulin several yards long in front of the car and then driving the length of the canvas, pick[ed] it up and [laid] it in front again until the bad stretch was covered.” As they arrived in Kanab, Uncle Dee was seen “shouting from the hood of the lead car to the many skeptics who had scoffed at his idea, ‘I told you so!’” I imagine him waving his hat and laughing. Three days later, after what I am sure was some much needed rest, Uncle Dee and company continued on to the North Rim, following the well-worn cattle path up Jacob Canyon, past Jacob Lake and the spot where my great-grandparents would built their first cabin fourteen years later, and through the wide forest meadows to Bright Angel Point.

I like to picture Uncle Dee in this moment, hurrying his family and friends out of the battered vehicles and escorting them to the canyon’s edge. He might have told them to close their eyes, as I do my friends, leading them by the hand through a thicket of aspens to stand, eyes still closed, and feel the expanse of open air before them. He might have told them about the first time he saw this view himself, riding at full gallop after a cow who had strayed from his herd. He nearly went off the edge but reined in his horse hard and sat panting, awe-struck. I am sure he told them his first thoughts upon seeing what had been nearby his camp for years, “This is one of the wonders of the world!
People will come from all corners of the globe and pay large sums of money to gaze at what we now behold.” And here they were, standing at the North Rim, looking down into the miles of branching side canyons, crimson cliff walls a mile high, rock falls and islands of sandstone named Woton’s Throne, Walhalla Plateau, and Vishnu Temple by early surveyors and explorers Clarence Dutton and Francois Matthes. Uncle Dee saw the possibilities there at the edge. As he stood there with his nephew and family after days traveling through sagebrush and ponderosa lined meadows I can cross in a morning, I am sure his vision felt more real than ever before.

... I have felt that sensation myself, standing at the edge of what feels like the glorious beginning to a depth of experience or color previously unknown. I felt giddy my first day of grad school when my American Studies class began with a video clip of Mary Colter’s architectural creations at the Grand Canyon. I felt my life intersecting with history. My family’s experience was in a very real sense telling the story of expansion and connection in the West, something I had never fully known. Along the way these moments of vertigo helped me realign my perceptions of our history with the facts I began to research. One of those moments came after spending hours interviewing my grandmother, Effie Dean Rich, searching documents in our family archive and researching in the Grand Canyon National Park Museum Collection the South Rim. There I found that my great-grandmother, Nina Nixon Bowman, spent that first summer of 1923 siphoning gasoline near Jacob Lake without her husband. She set up camp just off the main road that only fifty years before had been a Paiute migrational trail, later expanded into a wagon road by Jacob Hamblin and other Mormon settlers who were
shown the route by the Kaibab Band of Paiutes. Grandpa Bowman spent that first summer working at his father’s mechanic shop, the Highway Garage along Main Street in Kanab, as he had for years while Mama Nina’s brother Ezra stayed on the Kaibab with her through the tourist season. By 1927, as more people traveled to see the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, Grandpa Bowman sold his interest in the garage. Now the two-room cabin built just up the hill from their original campsite by the lake, with its gasoline pumps and foodstuffs, became the sole source of income for their growing family.

It seems that from the very beginning our family would have an intrinsic bond with travel and the road. “We started out there on the lake,” Grandpa Bowman once told an interviewer, “and when [the government] moved the road, why of course we moved.” What he doesn’t say is that a good portion of that gravel road he actually constructed himself, knocking down trees, moving boulders, all with a borrowed government bulldozer and grater and the “damned fool” determination he was known and admired for.

Grandpa conveniently placed the junction of Arizona Highway 67—which leads to the North Rim—and the “new highway,” US 89A—which stretches southeast from Kanab, Utah over the Kaibab Plateau to Bitter Springs on the reservation, and Flagstaff, Arizona—right in front of his new lodge and gas station. He changed this route after seeing the location of the junction planned for the first government-funded road on the Kaibab Plateau, ridiculously and dangerously placed at the bottom of a rather large hill, not exactly ideal for vehicles whose primitive brakes and underpowered motors needed a lot of space to make a run up the slope, or to slow down, for that matter. Bowman’s Road, as many called it, was much preferred to the government’s proposed route. After
its completion in the 1930s, Grandpa’s road became a section of the Highway 89A we travel today.

But my family travels along his road in more than just the physical sense. We follow a pattern he and Mama Nina set in place when they decided to move north with their children in 1929 from the small red-rock desert town of Kanab, Utah to Salt Lake City—a decision specifically made so their children, my grandmother Effie Dean and her younger brother Harold, could receive the best education available to them at the time. Their choice has now been imprinted on three generations of my extended family, an eighty-year-old pattern of education, travel, and adaptation. Those shifts, choices made by individuals like my great-grandparents or Uncle Dee, were the crossroads of change in the remote areas of Southern Utah and Northern Arizona.

Since I can remember I have searched for the scars of old roads and trails winding along mountainsides and through open stretches of sagebrush desert in Southern Utah and Northern Arizona. These roads, some barely visible, were once traveled regularly, were main highways even, and now only remind us of a time when high-roads and low-roads kept wagons and early automobilists out of snow drifts and mudholes.

On my family’s ranch on the Arizona Strip twenty miles east of Jacob Lake, these shallow roadbeds spread across the red sand like wobbly webs leading to Pueblo ruins or cliffside springs where tender meadows are prized away. One of my favorite roads twists through a maze of pinyon pine forest and sage, past sun-bleached cabins and even an old hogan leaning toward the ground. At its end you stand atop a nearly mile high cliff, a one-hundred-mile view to the edge of the Grand Canyon stretching before you, twenty
miles of curving vermilion cliff-face to the right and the cracked confines of canyons and tributaries to the Colorado River to the left. Sometimes I walk along the rim for hours, snapping photographs with my long-range lens to help me remember the exact color of mounds of purple clay and rusting iron deposits at the base of the cliffs. Or sometimes I sit with my feet hanging over the edge, watching the ravens and hawks dart in the updraft. I have called this place My Rim, since my best friend and I got lost trying to follow my dad’s landmark-based directions to a viewpoint at the edge of the Vermillion Cliffs. It was the first time I had driven one of these back roads without my dad or uncles to direct me. I was also the first time I knew what it was like to feel completely lost. We were running low on gas, and we didn’t know if the road we bounced down was actually going to take us near the rim. At that point Charlotte and I started to worry, our voices alternating between nervous giggles and the kind of continual hysterical shout that comes when instructions and the road no longer match.

“Char, we have a quarter tank left… we have to get to the rim so we can see where we are! Which turn should I take?” I said revving the engine once again to make it through another patch of deep sand.

“Go right! No Left… Right! Go Right!” she yelled, her voice matching the panic I felt. We had to reach the rim if we hoped to make some sort of contact with Jacob Lake on our cell phones. We had to let them know we had turned down the wrong road and were nowhere near Bonelli Rim like we had hoped. We needed to be able to see where we were.

The road grew narrower and began winding through pinyon pines so tightly I had to spin the wheel with my palms for the greatest speed, punching the gas as I came out of
the turn, just to jerk it back in the other direction to avoid a scrubby pine on my right and the patch of deep sand it grew in.

“Who made this dang road!” Char yelled. “Are they trying to get us killed?”

I laughed. “I don’t think they meant for it to be driven on like this. It winds too much. But, what if this road doesn’t lead anywhere?” We were losing light quickly, the pinking clouds just visible above the tops of the trees.

“Where’s the road?” I said, staring at Char. I slammed on my brakes. The road had just stopped, a patch of cactus marking what seemed to be a perilous end. “You think that is the rim?”

“I guess we should find out,” she said, smiling. “Don’t forget your phone.”

“Don’t forget your camera.” I said, reaching behind me for mine. If that was the rim then we could watch the sun set over Houserock Valley. Char and I both climbed out of the passenger-side door since earlier I had bungie-corded my door closed when the lock wouldn’t latch.

That wasn’t the first time I that had taken the wrong road on top of the Vermillion Cliffs, or found that it ended without explanation, though I guess in this case we were lucky it stopped where it did at the bottom of a sandy hill just before the rim. Sand doesn’t provide a lot of stopping power on stone. Combine that with my relative speed and Char and I could have shot off the cliff in an accidental Thelma-and-Louise-type death.

As I have traveled along many of these roads, evidence, artifacts of life, are visible to anyone who is looking. Rusted cans dotted with bullet holes heaped under the closest tree, the too-straight line of rocks—remnants of Pueblo flood-irrigation canals—
branching off the indentation of an old wash like the veins in a leaf, a deposit of picked-over pottery sherds and arrowheads trailing down hillsides, a sandstone chimney, a manmade hoodoo still attached to its floorboards—no walls.

Looking at all of these artifacts, it is no wonder to me then that roads or paths, trails and footsteps, are a metaphor for life experience. A life is often represented by linear movement through time, events linked together by the rotation of earth, by sunsets and sunrises, phases of the moon, heartbeats, in a long line of memories, feelings, photographs, and experiences as unique as the individual they signify. A road is just as unusual. Roads cross distance, uniting one place to another over fractured mountains, through grasslands, or zigzagging through deserts from one spring to the next. They are worn with use, changed over seasons, and avoided after years of disrepair or advancements in technology. Roads and lives can lead to freedom and change, to mistakes and pain, to rest and love and home. Across the country this forward momentum through time and distance, the progression of lives and industry, can literally be traced in the dirt, following old wagon roads now cemented over as interstates and highways or covered by years of shifting sand and development. Each road tells a story, cuts a swath through the lives of the people that created it, traveled on its changing surfaces, or chose to take another way. It is an artifact of the past and present to be read, a documentary of life as it is today, still connected to the past that created it.

... I have not always understood my family’s history as I do now. I spent years sharing snippets of family stories with tourists traveling down the road, but my desire to understand my history began with the funeral of a distant relative, someone I never knew.
The night before the funeral I had found my name written in my grandmother’s hand on the work schedule with a note that read, “Come see me.” I had walked through the service hallway that leads to her apartment and found myself instinctively brushing my fingertips over the bins full of nails and screws and plastic washers my grandad had built on the wall more than forty years ago. I didn’t knock, just slowly opened the door, and she looked up.

“Tomorrow I need you to drive me to Panguitch, to John Henrie’s mother’s funeral.”

We had driven together numerous times on these highways as she shared the stories of her family and our history. As we drove to the funeral the next morning, she told me stories about her grandfather, Henry E. Bowman, who engineered and built the section of road we traveled on.

In the Panguitch chapel, I listened to the collective sniffles and laughs pulsing through the crowded pews. A pinching thickness grew in my throat but unlike all of the other things that usually make me emotional, I wasn’t crying because of honest appreciation or what should have been the obvious reason that day, hearing about the love and life someone had created. Instead, I was crying for my grandmother, envisioning the thin shape my life would have taken without the woman I sat next to, knowing that so much of my experience was stored inside her memories and the boxes of photographs, letters, journals, and 16mm film of people only she knew the names and stories of. Even though I had spent most of the past three years helping my grandmother organize her life and listening to hour-long tangents of family stories and advice, I couldn’t begin to remember all that she had told me. I had no record of those stories with her relatives, or
of the experiences she was sharing to help me understand how she had come to be the woman I knew. Like me, she had spent her summers training a new batch of college students to meet the needs of the changing tourist population at the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Her parents and relatives, like my own, had influenced every phase she had passed through, set in motion the life she lived. That day in Panguitch I was also crying for myself, for my unexplored history, and for lost time.

... 

A friend once told me he imagines he will die in an avalanche, a punishment for doing what he loves most, to be the first to race a snowmobile up the nearly vertical incline of a snow-filled mountain bowl. I will probably hit a tree. Or veer off an embankment or cliffside, possibly collide with a semi-truck, all while steering my car through the tiny viewfinder of my camera. I know it is dangerous, stupid, and I should probably just stop, pull off to the side of the road and photograph the contrast of light and color I have become addicted to capturing. But I don’t. I drive.

I am not sure exactly when this habit began, obviously after I earned my license, but I don’t remember feeling the intense need to document every change in the scenery each season until after I came home from living in China in 2002. Perhaps taking pictures this way is genetic. I’ve found pictures taken on the Kaibab Plateau during the 1920s by my great-grandfather Harold Bowman of winding dirt roads blanketed with golden aspen leaves, their white trunks a shining blur between dark pines and spruces. Or my grandad’s images of the Grand Canyon snapped through the thick spotted windows of his tiny Piper Cub airplane. They were both on their way back home, expected, but they were caught up in the scenery and the experience, enough to take a hand off the steering wheel and freeze
the scene in time. For me—and I imagine for them as well—there is something about the movement, the speed, the urgency of knowing that I have to work the next morning, have to be home in time to host an employee party, or would rather avoid the possible confusion of deer antlers and branches in a dark forest when my eyes are too tired to fully focus. This speed-blurred photography also might happen because to stop means to waste time, and even though I love to wander and explore, it seems that, like Grandpa Bowman or Grandad, I, too, have always felt the weight of time.

Figure 3. Grand Canyon – Aerial View by John Rich. Photograph. 1961

... I took my first camera to China my sophomore year of college and came home with sixty rolls of film from five months of teaching and traveling. Each weekend we
rode trains or drove in buses down narrow roads to new destinations, Xi’an, Shanghai, Beijing, Yangshou, Guilin, the Three-Gorges Dam, the Great Wall. I photographed the women in Yangshou hanging indigo and ruby cloths over doorframes, bleached to look like stained glass windows, the pointed mountains, like mossy teeth, actually hanging with mist like every ancient painting I had ever seen of the area, an old woman, only four feet tall, carrying a child strapped to her back, the sleeping toddler’s head flopping up and down with each step. I knew that if I didn’t take a picture of everything I saw I might never see it again. So I documented my life, everyday, my goofy students’ smiles covered in marshmallows and chocolate, or the swirling mist rising from the Li River in front of my kayak, or the way the frost only encrusted bushes and stones on the north side of the Great Wall. I wanted to remember them and knew from working each summer with a new set of employees and the endless stream of tourists at my family’s lodge that over time the colors and people might become just wisps of memory.

I think that’s when my compulsion to take hundreds of pictures began, through the anticipated loss of memory I knew would come, even with an experience so vibrant and distinctive as living on the other side of the world. Although it wasn’t conscious, when I came home I continued this habit. I began to photograph everything around me: my brothers and their wives, dinner with friends, and family parties that before just happened without the photographs. My aunts and uncles stopped bringing their cameras because they knew I would always have mine.

After I bought a new camera, digital SLR, photography became a part of me, my camera another appendage. When the cost of film no longer mattered, I could sit for hours perched above Salt Lake City and watch as the orange light of sunset spread across
the sky, the clouds like blankets of cotton candy, and track the changes in time and color
or watch the desert sky near Jacob Lake on nights so dense that my hand-shaped shadows
stood out on a field of brilliant stars. During each fall, I would spend my spare weekends
driving the roads between Salt Lake and Jacob Lake to work during the busy hunting
season—often up to eight times in the four-month period, 350 miles each way for a day
and a half of work. Sometimes driving through canyons full of gold willows and quaking
aspens in the sun was too much for me to pass up so I would wrap my camera strap
around my arm, roll down the window, and click as many pictures as I could before I had
to use both hands to drive. Sometimes I’d stop to include myself in the shot, arm
stretched out, smiling, the wind whipping my hair in my eyes. But to stop like that every
time I drove would make each trip last forever. Through those pictures I began to feel
what Mary Clearman Blew calls “the magnet pull of place,” connecting me to the spaces
between where I chose to stop along those various roads. That is when the dangerous, 80-
mile-per-hour pictures through my camera viewfinder began, when I felt so united to the
places I drove through each season. Somehow in those pictures I felt as if I could stop
time, stop the repetition of the back-and-forth drive from blending into one long memory.

I try to describe to people sometimes what all these places I drive to and through
mean to me, what it is like to have grown up near the Grand Canyon and Lake Powell, to
parallel the twisting Sevier River or mountain ranges through every season. And I can
begin to tell them, show them the hundreds of pictures duplicated year after year, drive
them in my car over paved and dirt roads for a weekend or a day, to our ranches, the
rivers, lakes, or our lodge. They can sit at our lunch counter built in the 30s, lean against
the doorframe my grandad tracked his grandchildren’s height by, or stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon, or atop the Vermillion Cliffs, search for arrowheads and ruins in the shifting sand, and see for a moment what I’ve experienced, how these roads, destinations, and their history are a part of me, how my family and I are forever are part of the story of land. But what my friends won’t know is how our history has changed, what has been lost or learned, our transformations over time, and how each time I am surrounded by such beauty and history it digs itself further into my consciousness, further illuminating the loss I anticipate will come. As Blew wrote, “I am bone-deep in landscape. In this dome of sky and river and undeflected sunlight, in this illusion of timelessness.” Like Blew, I see myself in the landscape. It isn’t just a familiarity with the curve of cliff or turn in the road, but to me, my history is stored in the mountains of cumulous clouds and red dirt.

My photographs, my attempt to stop time, to document every change I see is an illusion, like the Grand Canyon itself, a vast life-size panoramic painting that appears motionless, but is continually changing, eroding, evolving into deeper canyons, shifting colors, endless stories. My movement through canyons and spaces caught in those often blurry or tilted photographs, snatches of sun on water or rock faces as I drive will never be as composed or defined as the photographs I take while motionless, but by photographing these in-between places I am documenting my changing self. They are a record of action that reflects the time that no one else sees, time that can be much easier to forget. I see this contradiction in myself, my need to move and progress, my need to document, to explore and see, to freeze images in a frame. But while on the road, moving toward one of these many destinations, I am caught in the living composition of some great masterpiece, long curved stretches of blacktop, endless blue sky, and the interplay
of color and texture, motion and stillness. And I do stop now, wander on some forgotten road, hope I can find my way back, and add myself to a photograph of sun-tipped mesas and waving grass, the sky reflected in the mirror of my car hood. I take those hours framing the sunset, watching the light fade and darken with the same care I take recording these words and memories on paper, archived in my computer and file cabinets in my bedroom, reading essays to my family and sharing our stories with the tourists and scholars who research our history. It is an attempt, as poet and explorer Everett Ruess penned, to “mix and match my colors to the visioned splendors I’ve failed to catch.” Maybe then as we drive parallel to the old dirt highways and narrow winding paths built by my family and others like them, we will remember and understand the mirror in the road.
CHAPTER 2
TO DRINK FROM PLACES

Scenic overlooks and historic and prehistoric sites along the highways convey various aspects of the overall theme of "exploration and survival."

- Arizona Strip Tourism Website

Figure 4. Houserock Valley-Eastern View by Melinda Rich. 2008.
As the United States began expanding its borders through land purchases and settlements after military conflicts with Mexico in the early nineteenth century, settlers moved west in waves. Immigrants, scientists, or adventurers followed paths and tales of exploration, economic prosperity, or religious freedom. By the late 1840s, several travel routes had already been established, recreated and sold as maps to those willing to venture out without guides or expertise. Charts such as the “Map to Illustrate Horn’s Overland Guide to California and Oregon” provided few specifics, but marked the estimated distance between landmarks and through areas like the “Indian Enchanted Ground,” offering settlers views where “petrifications of every description abound.” The California, Oregon, and Santa Fe Trails, and South Pass (later called the Mormon Trail) led thousands of individuals and families across the country to “prove up” free land given to them by the government or try their hand at the gold mining and other mineral claims the West had to offer. Individuals sought the opportunity to own land or, in the case of the Mormons, to live in relative isolation free of religious intolerance. Some, like the Donner Party or the Martin and Willey Handcart Companies, defined their lives by the tragedy and hardship of their journey westward. But as the number of settlers increased and tales of riches and brave adventures spread, the isolation of the Salt Lake Valley changed. By the mid-1860s the residents there found themselves in a vital junction of Western travel and industry.

As soon as the majority of Mormon pioneers residing in Nauvoo, Illinois, had crossed the Great Plains to the Salt Lake Valley beginning in 1846 and were consolidated in one place, Brigham Young sent out scouting groups to survey the land in all directions and find areas suitable for farming. In 1849, only two years after
settling in Salt Lake, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began filling the greater Salt Lake valley. As new members of the church moved westward to the Great Basin, towns were also established farther and farther south. By 1854, Jacob Hamblin and at least twenty other men had been sent as surveyors and missionaries to the American Indian tribes in Southern Utah, founding Santa Clara and other desert towns. Four years later, Hamblin was asked to create friendly diplomatic relations with tribes in Northern Arizona.

Following the trail blazed in 1776 by Spanish Fathers, Escalante and Dominguez, Hamblin passed through the Arizona Strip and skirted the Vermillion Cliffs, locating springs and suitable pathways across the sand and gullies at the base of the cliffs. In 1858, he and his party crossed the Colorado River, to a spot where Hamblin began an over-twenty-year career of negotiations with the Paiute, Navajo, and Hopi peoples. His respectful relationship with the Indian tribes led to the expansion of Mormon colonies into Southern Arizona, linking these towns to Kanab and St. George, Utah. By the early 1880s this wagon road became known as the Honeymoon Trail, a name that suggests the numbers of Mormons traveling from settlements in Arizona to the newly built temple in St. George. Couples escorted by family and friends were married in the LDS temple and then spent their honeymoons traveling through the heat and dust toward home.

As settlers became familiar with desert living, learned from Natives necessary skills and the expertise needed to make safe passage across long stretches of desert, like digging for water in clay-bottomed washes and which plants are suitable for human consumption and feed for animals, some routes through Houserock Valley changed.
Early in his relationship with the Paiutes, Hamblin was shown a route up and over the wooded Kaibab Plateau, through what are now Jacob Canyon and Trail Canyon, down into the Houserock Valley. This trail cut off days of travel for those heading to St. George while passing several small lakes seasonally filled by spring run-off and rain. One of these lakes was given Jacob Hamblin’s name, a sign of respect by the Kaibab band of Paiutes. Jacob Lake continues to be one of the only continuous sources of water on the plateau. Later the expanded wagon road would make a vital stop along its shores.

Even into the twentieth century Hamblin’s wagon road branched off of the Honeymoon Trail’s route through Houserock Valley—guiding hundreds of travelers and tourists over the Kaibab plateau in automobiles, following the high ridges in bad weather or winding through cool canyons in warmer seasons where they could stop right in front of Jacob Lake Inn. It wasn’t until 1926 that this road through Houserock Valley was changed as part of the government-funded highway construction projects. The new highway, designated as part of State Route 11 in 1926 then renamed US Route 89A in 1969, was cut into the mountainsides, often parallel and bisecting Jacob Hamblin and the Paiute’s old trail. If you look carefully once you have descended sharp s-curves into Houserock Valley, you can just make out the tracks of one road running straight down a steep hill. Those early travelers used to drag logs behind the wagons for traction. I would be amazed if anyone could stay inside as they bounced over sagebrush and limestone.
In 1911, twenty years before the Navajo Bridge would span the sheer cliffs of Marble Canyon above the twisting Colorado River, before the first official highway would be built through Houserock Valley, and twelve years before my great-grandparents would drive their car to the shores of Jacob Lake, Sharlot Hall traveled from her home in Prescott to explore the Arizona Strip, a contested space between the unsettled boundaries of Utah and Arizona. She walked and at times nearly dragged her horses and wagon along various roads on the route known as the Honeymoon Trail which cut through the deep sand and washes of Houserock Valley, the wide section of sagebrush desert bordered by the Kaibab Plateau to the west and the Vermillion Cliffs to the east. Before
following these trails, Hall and her party passed through hundreds of miles of the Navajo Reservation and crossed the Colorado River at Lee’s Ferry. Two years earlier she had become the first woman in Arizona to hold public office and had spent her time as Arizona’s official historian documenting and raising awareness to the state’s unique beauties and cultural perspectives. Hall and her guides, like thousands of Mormon settlers, Native Americans, cowboys, adventurers, and tourists, were awed by the Vermillion Cliffs, the distance between springs and water holes, and the trails that navigated through the vast, seemingly uninhabited landscape. She hoped her description of the scenery and resources in the area would convince Arizona legislators to fight against Utah for rights to the section of land between the North Rim of the Grand Canyon and the current boundary of Utah. Her stories proved powerful and today the Grand Canyon—both the North and South Rims—resides entirely in the state of Arizona.

Her journals give me insight into an era of travel and experience that I can hardly comprehend. In 1911, just two years after Uncle Dee Woolley wound his automobile down the remote and rocky roads of Central and Southern Utah and to the North Rim, little change would have been made to any of the roads and trails branching out from Kanab. I often wonder if Hall had any idea of the history she would find in Houserock Valley and the surrounding areas. I know I never expected to find in her journal this description of how Houserock Valley got its name.

We came this evening in another deluge of rain to Jacob Hamblin’s “Rock House Hotel” which gave the valley its name. It is just a big block of sandstone fallen from the cliff and looking more or less house-like, with a cave in the side which served to shelter [Jacob] Hamblin and his companions on their first exploring trip. One of them took a piece of charred wood from the camp fire and wrote “Rock House Hotel” on the front of the rock before they went on and the valley has borne the name for years.
I don’t know anyone who tells the story this way. It’s not how I recount it either. Instead, standing near the end of the road leading into the narrow box canyon about a hundred feet across, if you look up on the far cliff wall directly east of the sunset, you can see the formation my family calls the Houserock. It isn’t a leaning slab of rock that shelters people from the rain or wind; I would be nervous to go under that slab, having seen snakes and spiders hiding in similar dark crevices.

Maybe we call this formation the Houserock because it looks like an opening door, a shadowy wedge left on the wall to mark the mass of sandstone that cracked and crumbled from the cliff face a hundred feet in the air. Our Houserock towers over Houserock Spring, a small cave beneath the cliff that collects water and used to refresh thirsty travelers and cattle as they moved along the Honeymoon Trail. In fact the names of hundreds of people are scattered through this small canyon, etched into the sandstone with sticks or sharp stones. Some names, and even an amateur painting of what looks like a boy with curly hair, are stained into the red rock with axle grease. I have read and photographed as many names as I can reach, scrambling over boulders and up deteriorating ledges that break away in my hands. But I have never seen Hall’s “Rock House Hotel,” only the remnants of a stacked stone shelter at the opening of the canyon, near the 130 year-old grave of an early traveler, May Whiting, and one side of a sun-bleached corral.

But it is possible my family is wrong about the Houserock, since years ago a pipeline was tunneled through the sand and clay to bring water to the homesteads on flatter ground down in the valley. The settlers could have blasted
Hamblin’s rock apart, broken it into segments that people or a team of horses could move to get easier access to the spring. There are car-sized boulders, chunks of sandstone the size of a refrigerator or a television, but none big enough to shelter a group of men from inclement weather. But maybe that door in the air tells a deeper story of the people who made camp in this narrow canyon, illustrates their connection to this challenging landscape that for some would become their permanent home.

Near the barn and water troughs on our ranch at the base of the Vermillion Cliffs, where we brand cattle in the spring and fall, where my cousins and brothers used to be pulled away from work at Jacob Lake to fix the miles of fences separating our land from our neighbor’s, and where I used to visit Adeline, the nearly crippled ranch hand who looked after our horses in the winter, a two-track road leads to the place we call Signature Rock. There the box canyon and Houserock spring serve as an archive of travel imprinted into stone.

I love to bring my friends here to see the names and dates left by hundreds of people: tourists, early settlers, outlaws, travelers, Mormon couples on their way to marry in the distant St. George, even the telltale fish symbol of the missionary-explorer Father Escalante carved into an exposed sandstone block. Here these sojourners left proof of their migration through the spectacular and daunting landscape. I tell the stories the same way I learned them from my family, though now I add in details I have researched, further deepening our knowledge of the area.

“Mel, Didn’t you say this is where the pioneers used to stop on their way up to Utah?”

“Yeah, they did.” I said, my voice shaking as our car bounced over sandy speed bumps cut by runoff during heavy rain. “After a while they didn’t need to go this way because they found other routes over the Kaibab Plateau, near our lodge. By the time automobiles came into the area, the roads didn’t follow the cliffs from spring to spring anymore. The road cut across the valley. It was a lot faster, and travelers could stop at Cliff Dwellers or Marble Canyon for supplies if they had forgotten anything after leaving Jacob Lake or needed to refuel.”
“Right,” my dad added, parking the car in the usual spot. “And the only people left out on these roads near the cliffs were the cowboys and ranchers working the land. See that rusty pipe? It was laid in the 1880s, maybe earlier. The technology made it easier for people to access the water. They didn’t have to travel as far and could store it in tanks and wells.”

“So do we just follow the road?” Sarah said, “Where are the names you were telling me about?”

“Well, that all depends,” I said, knowing Sarah was always up for an adventure. “We can follow the road up to the end of this canyon and see the names around there, or,” I said with added emphasis, “or, we could follow the pipeline and climb over the rocks to some of the names that are harder to reach. Which do you want to do?”

She laughed, “Well, it’s such a hard choice. Pipeline!” She blurted out at the end. “Let’s climb.”

So we took off up the steep sandy hill, our first steps sinking into the cracking surface. I reached for the dangling arm of a sagebrush and got enough traction to propel myself up the mound. Sarah bounded up the crumbling rocks. I stood near the top of the first embankment, with two more levels to go until we reached the first names. My dad turned in the opposite direction, walking the faded indentation of the Honeymoon Trail through the scrubby trees.

We scrambled up the incline and made it to the first set of names. Some were hard to read, the axle grease fading with every sunny day, but a few stood out.

“R.D., S.M., Josehin-o? Does that really say Josephino?” Sarah asked sidestepping along a narrow ledge for a better look. “This one is easier to read. H.
Brewer. At least I think it is an H. It is attached to the B like one letter. It looks like the date says ’79.”

“Yeah,” I said, following her across the rocks, “1879.”

“That is so crazy. Look at all of these names!” she said and rounded the next corner of the now visible path. “Do you think there are more up above?”

“There are. I’ve climbed up a few times, but it’s been awhile. My brothers and cousins have climbed all the way to the top of the cliffs. You have to be able to hold your own body weight up some of the ridges,” I said looking up the nearly six-hundred foot cliff.

“And people who passed through here in the 1880s wrote their names on some of those high ledges too?”

“Yes. Pretty amazing isn’t it. I wish I could photograph all of these names. I forgot to charge my camera battery so all I have is my phone. Maybe this low light will work to my advantage.”

“What is that grey thing over there, that box on top of the hill?” Sarah said pointing to the west.

“That is May Whiting’s grave. She died here on her way to Salt Lake. She was really sick and her family hoped that if they brought her to the doctors there, they could save her. But as they got closer, she kept getting worse.”

“And so she died here in the middle of the desert, and her family had to leave her?”

“Yeah. In fact her parents left her younger brothers with a wagon and team way back on the other side of the valley. They were trying to get May here so they could
bathe her and let her rest. The parents gave the boys enough supplies to meet them here at the spring.” I said, thinking the story through.

It had been tragic, as the Whitings hurried with their daughter in one wagon as she grew weaker and weaker, their young sons following twenty miles behind. I can imagine the urgent rush of adrenaline as they unpacked and shifted supplies between wagons. How they hugged their sons, told them to be brave, and hoped they had taught them how to handle a team well enough to cross the dry and barren valley. Their sister didn’t live long after they had separated ways. The boys had said the experience changed their lives. Days after they reached their parents at the spring, the Whitings buried May near the Houserock, a sandstone headstone marking her grave.

Sarah and I had nearly reached the spring. I pointed to the wall on our right. “I love that picture of the little boy,” I said, running my finger over a face stained in axle grease on the sandstone. “Sometimes I like to think it is one of May’s brothers leaving a part of himself behind with his sister, some sort of guard over the place where she and her story would always stay.”

Sarah smiled, “I think that sounds just about right. I think I’d want to do the same, leave some proof that I had been here. But why didn’t her family move her body to a cemetery later?” she said looking back toward the cement tomb.

“I don’t know. And years later her extended family didn’t know where the grave was. That cement was only poured twenty years ago when my dad helped one of our neighbors find May’s resting place. I guess they had been searching for it for a long time.”
“Wow, one of your neighbors was looking for a grave that ended up right by your ranch?”

“Yeah. Pretty crazy, isn’t it? It makes me wonder how many other people traveled down these roads and didn’t make it out alive.”

“Yeah, It definitely makes me wonder.” Sarah said as we turned up the trail past the crumbling rock wall I used to think was a Paiute Indian ruin, toward May’s grave to pay our respects. “All these stories right off the highway.”

“Oh, just wait ‘til my dad takes us to the different Indian ruins spread across the valley. The Honeymoon Trail is just one of the histories.”

Figure 7. Signature Rock Axle-grease Drawing by Melinda Rich. Photograph. 2009
This is the fourth pottery sherd I have found in one minute. It looks small and triangular under the shade of sagebrush, the telltale black and white brushstrokes crisscrossing the surface. But as I lean over and pluck it from the crusted dirt, it triples in size.

“Dad! Check this one out! It is bigger than my hand!” I yell, running toward my dad, hunched over and peering between the rock and sagebrush for arrowheads and spear points only he seems to find. My cousins, brothers, and the handful of employees we have brought with us to the large ruin situated on the northwestern side of the Vermillion Cliffs, dart out from behind trees and move near me. We are on an adventure, as my dad likes to call it, which means we will drive the winding dirt roads that crisscross Houserock Valley, past our barn and corrals and the shallow cement pond that hiccups with tiny toads, until we have ascended thousands of feet to the edge of the towering Vermillion Cliffs. But we have just begun this journey, having first stopped at Signature Rock and climbed over boulders and ledges, shouting to each other the names of pioneers and cowboys that echoed in the narrow canyon.

“Dad, look at it! It is the cool painted kind, and it’s curved. Do you think it was a bowl or something?” I am nine and have been searching these ruins longer than I can remember. My dad knows this landscape in the same way I do after spending years ranching here, cataloguing the changes and history in the dirt.

“Wow, honey. That is the biggest one I have seen in a while. Here, wipe it off,” he says beginning to rub the dry red sand from the curve of the bowl. Underneath, the
pattern is beautiful, thick slashes of black on a field of white, an X missing one leg leaning sideways along the bottom edge.

“Dad, who did you say made these? Not the Navajos right?”

“Nope. We are told it was the Ancestral Pueblo, relatives of the Hopi and Paiutes. Scientists are still doing studies on the artifacts they have found here to understand how they lived and what happened to them. See the cloth stretched across the stones.”

Some of my cousins had moved away by this time, stooped again to search for the relics of Native American tribes that had lived for hundreds of years in Houserock Valley to harvest grass seeds and track wildlife. They had heard the story my dad was going to tell, but to me the story felt magical. The small cluster of people around him turned as he pointed toward the largest section of ruin. Over the past few years these ruins had been excavated, documented, shrouded in heavy black fabric.

“So, Steve, when did the people leave? I mean it looks like a lot of people could have lived here? Did they run out of water or food?” an employee asked from behind me. He knew like me that my dad would have the answers since he had already fielded hundreds of questions about transportation and local history as we walked along a section of the Honeymoon Trail earlier that morning.

“Well, it seems they left around the same time many of the other ruins throughout Arizona, Utah, and Colorado were vacated, somewhere around the thirteenth century. There was a severe drought in much of the Southwest and even though the Colorado River provided a constant water source, as you can see from how dry this summer has been, traveling the distance between water might have been too difficult, and there wasn’t enough rainfall to support the crops they farmed with flood agriculture down in the
valley,” he said, pointing down the mountain. “The pine nut crop depleted, so rabbits and other game moved toward areas with more water, and the people living here followed the food.”

I thought about this for a minute. “So, Dad, is that why the road goes up here? So the people could move their stuff? Or was this one of the roads you used to ride when you spent your summers up here with the cowboys?”

“Wait, Steve, you lived up here in the summers? It is so hot!” another employee asked, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

My dad laughed. “Yeah, I did, and it sure was hot. My brothers, John and Matt, did too at different times. We branded and moved cattle from pasture to pasture here on top of the Paria Plateau. Sometimes we wouldn’t come back to Jacob Lake for a couple of weeks at a time.”

“Wow, so you were a real cowboy? With a gun and everything?”

“I guess you could put it that way. Yes, I had a gun, and a horse. Sometimes I had three guns. I’d take all the guns they would give me. We would follow roads like this one, built by pioneers in the 1880s, or trails and washes, and lead the cattle to different ranges we had the rights to. In fact, we used to own the grazing permits for most of the land on top of the Vermillion Cliffs. We ran more than a thousand cattle up here.”

“So why don’t you do it now?”

“Well, we weren’t making money since in the 70s the BLM cut down the amount of cattle they would allow on their lands and wouldn’t let us make the necessary changes to grazing rotation that would make our outfit profitable. So as much as we didn’t want
to, we sold the grazing permits for all the land on top of the Vermillion Cliffs to another rancher.”

“But you are still taking us up there? Doesn’t someone own it now?”

“The permits have changed hands several times, now it is owned by a subsidiary of Wal-Mart, which seems wrong, but just because we don’t own it doesn’t mean it isn’t still ours. We built many of the roads and cinderblock houses up on top of these cliffs and unless someone tears them down, they will always be a reminder to me of those years up here. And I think it is important that you all see what you’ve been so close to. The view from Bonelli Rim is incredible. You can see all the way to the edge of the Grand Canyon and everything in between. Which reminds me, we had better get going if we want to make it before sundown.”

My dad hollered to the people scattered over the shrubby hillside and shallow ruins. I ran toward the car parked next to a collapsed sandstone wall, watching my step, hopping over cactus patches and loose rocks. As I climbed into the suburban, I looked down at the road. “Dad? Why does the road go right through the ruins?”

“Well, I’d imagine it started as a trail made by the Indians that lived here, but then after they left and the homesteaders in the area found these ruins the trail just got bigger. Then old Bonelli, a Swiss homesteader, made a wagon road to reach the grazing pastures up on top. This road marks the easiest route up and over the long lip of sandstone. Maybe Bonelli didn’t even notice the ruins when he expanded the trail. The researchers here have built up some of these walls and cleared out hundreds of years of drifting sand from inside the rooms. People like to look at this kind of history, and this ruin is pretty easy to get to.”
With that he turned the ignition. We moved forward through the deep sand to the high ledge just up the road. He maneuvered the car, angled one tire at a time, and crawled up the hill. He cleared the rocky shelf without scraping or high centering.

“Looks like you’ve driven this road before, Steve. I thought for sure we’d get stuck,” the inquisitive employee said from behind.

“Naw.” My cousin said from the middle seat, “Uncle Steve’s an old pro.”

... 

As Spanish explorers and early traders crossed the sands of Houserock Valley in the mid-1500s to discover the fabled riches of the Southwest, the Shoshone, Goshute, Ute, Paiute, Fremont, and Navajo were a few of the Native American tribes that spread across Utah and Northern Arizona, long before and my ancestors settled in the territories. Though the different tribes inhabited their own specific regions in these states, their borderlands were areas of both shared natural resources and sites of intertribal warfare.

The Paiutes’ intimate understanding of the area in which they lived, the distances between water and food sources, the seasonal changes, required a migratory lifestyle. They sent scouting parties to the Kaibab Plateau to watch for pinions drooping with nutrient rich pine nuts. They knew the migrations of mule deer populations, the breeding season for jackrabbits and ground squirrels, practiced flood irrigation to boost the productivity of corn and beans in the driest climates. This attention to detail, to the tracking of patterns in the land and the wildlife, altered the steps they took. They moved from one home to the next, packing and collecting their seasonal necessities, leaving the Kaibab when the snow began—sometimes leading to over 200 inches—following their familiar routes to milder climates and varying food sources.
On these treks I imagine them teaching their children how to live in these places, sharing the generational stories of their movement across the land, many of which are included in their religious ceremonies and texts. The Hopi of Central Arizona call these sacred accounts “The Four Migrations,” which “outlined the manner in which [the individual clans] were to make their migrations, how they were to recognize the place they were to settle permanently, and the way they were to live when they got there.” Each clan was required to make the four directional migrations; once they had finished these journeys, they were to return to Tuwanasavi or the Center of the Universe, the area now known as the Hopi Reservation. Many of the clans did not return home to the deserts of the Southwest, but stayed in easier climates with plenty of rainfall and food sources. These travel narratives taught future generations the values and beliefs the tribe ascribes to, how to hone the skills they would need to survive during every change in the season.

The Apache too have their migrational patterns, tracking their progress by landmarks, by rock formations and travel routes where sacred legends began. As with the Hopi, these routes formed their creation myths, where water sources defined life. Keith Basso, in his study of the influence of language and landscape among the Western Apache, quotes a tribal elder, whose words resonate with the patterns of Western migrational experience my family is a part of.

How will you walk along this trail of wisdom? Well, you will go to many places. You must look at them closely. You must remember all of them. Your relatives will talk you about them. You must remember everything they tell you. You must think about it, and keep thinking about it, and keep on thinking about it. You must do this because no one can help you but yourself. Wisdom sits in places. It is like water that never dries up. You need to drink water to stay alive, don’t you? Well, you also need to drink from places. You must remember everything about them.
It seems the Apache knew the importance some places hold in the lives of those who pass through them. Across the Houserock Valley there are places like Signature Rock that hold more than memories. There are pockets of recorded history centered around springs and watering holes, box canyons, sandstone chimneys, and homestead foundations, where the people traveling on those early trails left their mark on the landscape.

Figure 8. Hod Brown Homestead Cabin by Melinda Rich. Photograph. 2006.
Sharlot Hall described coming upon one of these places in her 1911 journal.

The wagon cover was leaking and my raincoat holding puddles of water in every fold when we dragged over a higher sand-ridge and I saw a little red sandstone house as prim and trim looking as any farmhouse, standing on the edge of that wild reach of Nowhere.

I had a moment’s hope of seeing somebody, man or woman, who could tell us whether we were on the right road and how far it was to Fredonia but the little place was deserted. We went in at the open back door and found a big fireplace and dry wood enough to start a fire; some old traps littered the floor and a lizard ran up the wall in fright but the dry, warm room seemed like a palace to me.

After I had cooked dinner and we had unloaded the wagon and spread all the wet things out along the fence to dry I amused myself by reading the pencil scrawls all over the walls. Evidently this little house had sheltered many a weary and storm-beaten traveler and their gratitude was written on walls—along with some flings at the country itself. I copied a lot into my notebook.

Some of the guests left dates, as one: “Oct. 4 1908. A heavy snow storm on old Buckskin on the 2nd—very grateful for Mr. House, especially for Mr. Fireplace. Gracia and adios. Wind blowing like hell.”

Another, probably a summer visitor, had left his plaint: “When you are traveling through the sandy deserts of Arizona most famished for water and team give out always thank the man that put up the little rock house and watering place. A Missouri Puke bound for Oregon; and I’ll keep going. I may be crazy but I haint no fool.”

A cowboy had left a pencil sketch of a limp-looking man on horseback and this sorrowful complaint: “Crossed the sand desert in a sand storm. Trappers from Coyote ranch landed here in the night. Gee! What a lonesome place! Everything looks dreary; everything looks weary,—to hell with this windy hole!”

Another brief sojourner had written on the door: “All the bad country in the U.S. was put together and they called it Arizona.”

I was more inclined to echo the ones who had written: “Thank you Little House; thanks Mr. Fireplace; thank you Mr. Man that built this place.”

Standing in the middle of Houserock Valley surrounded by dry miles of sand and sage, or sitting on the edge of the Vermillion Cliffs, I can imagine what it must have felt like to happen upon the lone rock house. I wonder if that little house still stands or if the scribbles and artwork of weary, disgruntled, or grateful travelers are still visible on
cracking plaster and wood. The old homestead cabin just twenty feet from the barn on our Houserock Valley ranch was torn apart by people hunting for coins and memorabilia supposedly hidden in the walls (The cabin was owned by Hod Brown, a colorful 1920s bootlegger and poacher, who would announce his newest batch of moonshine to the citizens of Kanab by singing and dancing in front of great-great-grandfather Henry’s mercantile, “Hey boys, say boys, have you heard the news? Hod Brown’s come to town, with a load of booze”). Who knows what kind of stories those walls might have told us? I am sure there are roads in this valley that lead to nearly undisturbed places with hidden memories just like these rocky archives.

... 

Southern Utah and Northern Arizona are linked together by few roads, but it is a place where the history of modernity, the change from wagon roads to paved, is still recorded in the dirt. From my favorite viewpoint above Houserock Valley along the rim of the Vermillion cliffs, Highway 89A looks like someone has taken a Sharpie and ruler drawing a fat line connecting the Kaibab Forest and our lodge to the distance beyond. At the rim you can see for more than a hundred miles to where the earth begins to curve and the horizon becomes fuzzy. It is the perfect place to watch the night rise as the brilliant glow just above the Kaibab Plateau to the west, fuchsia and gold, blends to green high in the darkening Arizona blue sky. And directly east, past the crimson face of the curving Vermillion cliffs, past the snaking slot canyons and tributaries of the Colorado River, and past the blushing Echo Cliffs, a rising shadow on the eastern horizon swallows the pale inverted colors of sunset.
On most afternoons if there isn’t the haze of a forest fire or high winds blowing dust across the distance, the glare and heat at noon begins to fall to the west, the valley below sharpening with contrast. I sit along the rim sometimes, my feet dangling over the edge, and study the sinuous grooves of dry washes and the deep cut banks of flash floods fanning out from the iron-streaked cliffs below me. In throbbing thunderstorms, if you can see through the volley of rain, these cliffs run with hundreds of waterfalls. Some thin trickles are caught in the heavy winds and thrown over the valley as mist and sand and foam. Other floods clogged with chunks of sandstone and twisted wood, crash down more than a thousand feet to batter the huge mounds of purpled clay and ruddy sand on the valley floor.

I have often wished I could sit here at the edge in one of these storms, watch a thousand rivulets join in washes and canyons, swelling to a coursing torrent, sweeping sediment and boulders across the straight dark line of Highway 89A that cuts across the valley. I have waited out one of these storms, pulling my car off to the side of the road on the highest ground I can find, hoping for visibility and the booming thunder to inch further across the sky. Driving after these storms can be dangerous; the highway follows the rise and fall of the landscape, streaming clay and rocks gathering in the dipping road.

On a clear day you can just make out another line stretching across the valley, the Honeymoon Trail, which runs almost parallel with the paved highway, used to be the main thoroughfare through this wide valley. The trail has changed over the years, first as a trail used by the Navajo and Paiute for hunting and trading, then expanded by homesteader’s wagons, following the same winding path along the base of the cliffs,
leading thousands of people to springs and watering holes as they crossed the desert. But depending on the weather the road branched and wove through a maze of sagebrush avoiding deep sand in the summer heat and the crumbling banks of flooded washes during the monsoons. But now, from atop the cliffs the trail is a pale and fading thread that with each thunderstorm and high wind seems to blend into the gullies cut deeper into the sand.

Today I can pass through Houserock Valley from Jacob Lake on Highway 89A in an hour, or climb over the rocky ledges in my car that used to crack wagon wheels, or walk a path towards hidden springs used by the Paiute or the Ancestral Pueblo. To many people this route is just a beautiful stretch of highway that connects you from Utah to Arizona and national parks along the roadside. But to me this valley is a record of movement, of the shifting natural and human forces constantly in motion in this high red desert. The road has changed, and Highway 89A is cemented into place, but the highway we know it now is just one of the local narratives drawn in the dirt.
CHAPTER 3

NOBODY’D PULL A STUNT LIKE THAT BUT A DAMNED FOOL BOWMAN

Now, when good roads are one of the necessities of modern life, and it is possible to go from one end of Utah to the other in a few hours, it is difficult for people to realize the hard way by which the settlers of early times went from place to place.

- The History of Kane County

...
US Highway 89 stretches through five states. It begins in Flagstaff, Arizona, traverses the Navajo Reservation and then skirts the sinuous side-canyons of Lake Powell. It cuts through striated sandstone formations to Kanab, Utah, where it leaves the desert landscapes and winds through the cool Sevier and Sanpete Valleys, passing the entrances to Zion and Bryce National Parks. As it travels north it links together farmland and pastures, small towns, the capital city, Salt Lake, Bountiful, Ogden, Logan, and Bear Lake’s turquoise waters where it ventures into Idaho, then Wyoming and Montana, ending at the border with Canada.

But this highway that by 1934 extended for 1685 miles from the border of Canada to the border of Mexico didn’t always follow this route. In fact, the branch of 89 that passes Lake Powell wasn’t constructed until the bridge over Glen Canyon Dam was completed in 1959. Before that automobilists and tourists drove through Fredonia, Arizona, crossed the sagebrush desert and maneuvered the winding roads of the Kaibab Plateau. They passed my family’s growing lodge, Jacob Lake Inn, at the gateway to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, drove down the hairpin turns to the sweeping views of Houserock Valley and the Vermillion Cliffs to cross the Colorado River at Lee’s Ferry or, after 1929, peered out their windows as they drove across the Navajo Bridge at Marble Canyon, 487 feet above the river’s emerald-green water.

It wasn’t until the early 1920s that most western states received grants to construct and improve important roads across the open land where local booster clubs had previously built roads connecting town to town. In 1925 the US government established a numbering system for highways across the nation. Three years before, the first section of what would become US Highway 89 was completed after over a year of
construction and heated controversy. They used to call it Bowman’s Road, named after Henry E. Bowman, my great-great-grandfather. He worked with his relative “Uncle Dee” Woolley and townspeople in Kanab to expand and improve existing roads, positioning the small farming and ranching community at the center of Southern Utah and Northern Arizona tourism.

But this positioning would not have been possible without the growing influence of automobiles. In the century before, the railroad had held a similar place in American consciousness. By 1879, the United States government had established the National Geographic Survey, headed by Clarence King, to evaluate government land holdings west of the Mississippi. Two years later, this official appraisal of the nation’s assets, now led by Major John Wesley Powell, would alter the population’s view of the West and solidify it as the future of prosperity and power. This shift was aided by the creation of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869, which generated what many tourists experienced as the “annihilation of space,” where the “railroad linked places together as its speed destroyed the distance between them.” The ability to see the expanses of the far West pass by in little more than twenty-four hours “put the great sections of the Nation into sympathy and unity” as tourists and travelers journeyed across the country to view what the nation had to offer. As one railroad guidebook exclaimed, “These are the lands of gold, of silver, of coal, of agriculture. … These are the lands of new endeavors, of fresh impulses, and for these reasons are of special interest to tourists, businessmen, and seekers after health and pleasure.” These lines of iron and steel had set in place the future of the West and with it the future of those who lived there.
While the transcontinental railroad made it possible for thousands to venture westward, exiting in Colorado mining communities, newly irrigated Idaho towns, or California’s cities on the coast—whatever part of the West to which they laid claim—it did not solve the problem of traveling to remote areas where the railroad did not reach. Even in the decades following the coast-to-coast link, stagecoaches, wagons, and horseback were still the most common form of transportation through the vast majority of western lands. As time went on, roads across the country began to lengthen, grow wider, linked together in an expanding matrix of towns, cities, and scenic interests.

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Today I am glad my air-conditioning works because although it is barely 10:00 a.m., when I step out of my car into the July sun, my dark hair immediately radiates with heat. I cross the crunchy grass near the parking lot in seconds and step off the two-foot wall bordering the old public library, my bag of notebooks, pens, and camera whacking against my hip. This is the second day in a row I have driven the thirty-seven miles from Jacob Lake to research my history in the Kanab Heritage Museum. I know I will be the first person there this morning, just like yesterday. I open the door and sign my name on the guest list ten lines below my previous signature.

“Well, hello again, dear!” Mrs. Glover says, smiling up at me from her desk. “I wasn’t sure if you were coming back to visit or not. I thought you might have seen enough yesterday.”

“Nope. I still have a whole shelf of books to go through. I haven’t even looked through the ones on transportation and the Vermillion Cliffs,” I said, moving toward the long table in the middle of the room. The three-ring binders I had been looking through
yesterday, “Bowman,” “Hotels,” “Kaibab Plateau,” were still stacked in the middle of the
table, my page markers sticking out from all directions. I sit down in the same chair as
before and pull out my notebook. I scribble down the date and draw a line across the top
of the page.

“Mrs. Glover? What time is the Model T Club coming in this afternoon?”

“Soon, I think. That nice tall man with the camera wanted to come and take some
pictures. How long will you be in today? It sounded like he wanted to talk with you
again.”

The man had seemed a little out of place the day before, carrying his bulky movie
camera through the rows of Kanab’s collective heirlooms, handmade lace tablecloths and
dresses, blue and white baking powder cans, a baby buggy, dishes, surveyor’s maps,
buttermilks, saddles, a sewing machine, with every inch of wall space filled with old
photographs and paintings. He had stood for a while near my table, watching as I studied
a photograph of the house my great-grandfather was born in.

“It looks like you have been here a while,” he had said, taking a seat across from
me at the large wooden table.

“Actually, I’ve only been here for a few hours. I am researching the history of
Kanab for my master’s thesis, and as you can see this place is full of interesting
information.”

“So tell me then, why is Kanab important?” the man had asked. “What makes it
different from all of the other towns we have driven through?”

I had laughed at this question. I was just beginning to piece that together. So far I
had learned that though Kanab now is a small town with only 3500 residents and
covering roughly 14 square miles, it had been a crossroads for local cultures and tourism since the turn of the 20th century. Beginning in the 1930s, the landscape and cowboy culture had been featured in over 100 films such as *The Lone Ranger* (1938 and 1956) and *Pony Express* (1953). The red rock landscapes became iconic images of the Old West, free of the modernity that Uncle Dee and my great-great-grandfather Henry Bowman had worked to bring to the area. The unique rock formations of the region were the backdrops for large sections of *The Planet of the Apes* movies in 1968 and 2001. My grandmother’s cousin even played the piano for Clark Cable in her red silk pajamas as he toured the country with friends.

This wasn’t the first time I had seen the Model T Club of America drive through town, the boxy frames of 1920s Ford Touring Cars, Coupes, Roadsters, and Run-Abouts slowing traffic all along the thirty-seven-mile distance between Kanab and Jacob Lake as people would stare or wait for the opportune time to pass the knot of old cars on the highway. Some years I would meet one of these cars winding around turns on one of the dirt roads near Jacob Lake much as I imagine these cars did when the first government-funded highway was built in the 1930s. Each time I see those cars put-putting up the mountainside I am reminded that it was those first motor tourists, driving their own vehicles or touring in buses, that helped change the economy of many towns along Highway 89 and areas surrounding Jacob Lake. The roads built in these high deserts helped connect Utah and Arizona to surrounding states and the country as a whole, much as the railroad had linked the Eastern and Western sections of the United States together centuries before.

...
By 1914 the Ford Motor Company revolutionized the assembly-line system of automobile production so car ownership was no longer considered a luxury for the average American. With the rise in the number of vehicles and possibility for quicker travel across long distances, the Good Roads Movement, as it was known, began to take hold across the country. Various road improvement groups circulated pamphlets supporting the expansion of trails and road systems that they hoped would foster quicker postal and merchandise deliveries. One advocate stated, “Mothers must aide in creating good roads sentiment, so that their children will as future citizens be educated to the axiomatic truth that good roads are the milestone that backs the advancement of civilization.” The development of better roads, like the previous century’s attitude toward westward settlement and exploration, had become the individual American’s link to national pride and progress. Unlike the packaged tours provided by railroad companies and tourist books, the automobile allowed Americans to explore the country like horse-backed adventurers in the Old West. People were encouraged to personally experience the scenery the nation had to offer, which “connected tourists with the diverse people and places that embodied the nation,” as the railroad had done in the previous century. It was Manifest Destiny of the 1920s, “an extensive system of improved roads ensured the forward march of progress” as many supporters saw it. Slogans such as “See Europe if you will, but see America first” fostered national pride and the growing auto-touring industry. But as noted in Derek Hayes’ *Historical Atlas of the American West*, maps like George F. Cram & Company’s *Transcontinental Highways of the United States* (1918) showed interstate highways but failed to relay the condition of the road. Hayes states that
“just because a road was marked on the map did not mean it was a ‘good’ road—that is, a paved or at least improved highway.”

Figure 10. Utah Map of State Roads 1910 by Utah State Road Commission. From History of Highway Development In Utah by Ezra C. Knowlton. Copyright © 1961. Utah State Road Commission. Reprinted by permission of the Utah Department of Transportation.
There are only four maps in the book *History of Highway Development in Utah.*

For a volume dedicated to tracking the changes brought about by the Highway Department, I would expect there to be more than four single-page maps. The scarcity makes me feel like they are leaving something out even though the book is four inches thick. So I scan the index for names I recognize, Bowman, Woolley, Chamberlain, Rider, Glover, Mace. None of their stories are here. It looks like the maps are all I have in this book to compare to local histories on road construction and an autobiography penned by my great-great-grandfather Henry E. Bowman. His road is here though, that small, dotted stretch between Mount Carmel Junction and Kanab, Utah. Seventeen miles over rock and sand, past what are now the Coral Pink Sand Dunes and the East entrance to Zion National Park. Before he built the road in 1921-1922, tourists and locals drove an extra sixty-five miles to Kanab through Alton and Johnson Canyon, a series of small farming communities and homesteads. Most people thought Henry couldn’t build a road over the miles of sand that only twelve years before had made his relative Edwin D. Woolley Jr. drive feet at a time over a stretched-out canvas tarp to provide enough traction through the dunes. But it seems those concerns didn’t mean much to him, and from what I’ve read about his determination to make Kanab, not Alton, the crossroads for trade and tourism in Southern Utah, I think I am right.

It was citizens in Kanab who led the expansion of the Good Roads Movement in much of Southern Utah. In 1916, great-great-grandfather Henry returned to Kanab with his family after living in the Mormon Colonies in Mexico for almost ten years. While in
Mexico he had established a series of mercantile businesses between Colonia Dublan and Colonia Juarez. To decrease transport times between colonies, he led teams of men to build and improve roads and lay railroad tracks across remote areas of Mexico. During the initial years after his return to Kanab, he rebuilt the business, Bowman & Co Mercantile, which he had sold to several Kanab citizens ten years earlier. As his business improved, he bought a new car since Mexican rebels had confiscated his previous vehicle during the Revolution. But as Southern Utah tourists and local tradesmen had found, many of the roads were difficult to maneuver. Henry’s experience in Mexico proved useful during this stage of the Kanab Good Roads Movement.

As Marguerite Shaffer states in *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*, reliable trade routes were essential for a successful business in these remote areas; “good roads … the milestone that back[ed] the advancement of civilization,” supported the growth of towns and cities along the roadside. One of the most troublesome sections of road heading north to Salt Lake stretched over seventeen miles of deep sand between Orderville/Mt. Carmel and Kanab. As my great-great-grandfather explains, “This sand was so heavy that it was impossible to negotiate it with an auto and it was a hard day’s work for a good team to cross with an empty wagon.” In 1919 the state of Utah had been granted a bond from the US government to build and improve roads. The seventeen miles of sand had proved too difficult for most travelers and they would bypass it through Alton and Johnson Canyon, sixty-five miles out of the way of Kanab on a consistently bad road. High altitudes kept temperatures low in this narrow valley where spring snow melt made the Alton road muddy or covered in snowdrifts for half of the year.
Henry Bowman’s experience laying railroad track and building roads in the deserts of Mexico led him to propose a plan to the State Road Commission and county commissioners to construct a road across the sand dunes, advocating that “sand is the best natural road bed in existence and required less capping than any other material.” Not only would this road shorten the travel time for people headed north to Salt Lake or south to Arizona, it would also establish Kanab as the center of commerce in the area and help improve his mercantile business as well as bolster Kanab’s economy. The previous surveyors had estimated it would take at least $400,000 to build a good gravel-surfaced road over the route Henry had proposed. However, the State Road Commission had only allotted Kane County $30,000 for road improvement and expansion. But even with the disparity between proposed amounts, Henry put in a bid for the $30,000 and his plan was accepted. Construction commenced in 1921, beginning a controversy between citizens of Alton and Kanab.

The process of transporting building materials was grueling. The road took over a year to complete (1921-1922). As Henry informs us in his autobiography, they spent months “hauling clay from the clay knoll and spreading a think layer over the sand, then covering it with a layer of gravel hauled from a Gravel hill near Mt. Carmel.” But as the construction continued, citizens of Alton and Johnson Canyon began to worry about what the change in the road would do to their limited economy. With the help of rival engineers, Alton townspeople convinced one county commissioner that Henry’s low-ball estimate would never be enough to build the road over the sand. The commissioner fired Henry and posted a notice in the Kanab Post office stating “that anyone who worked for Henry Bowman would receive no pay.” But this opposition did not stop Henry. With the
help of the people of Long Valley and many citizens of Kanab, they continued to work until he was reinstated as chief engineer. Henry even finished under budget, leaving $3,000 for future improvements. With this bold move and after the road’s completion in 1922, Kanab became a center for tourist travel and trade and the Kanab-Long Valley road became the preferred route in this remote area, beginning a shift in road construction techniques and the tourist industry.

Figure 11. State of Utah Map of Proposed Primary, Secondary, & Forest Roads on the State Road System 1922 by Utah State Road Commission. From History of Highway Development In Utah by Ezra C. Knowlton. Copyright © 1961. Utah State Road Commission. Reprinted by permission of the Utah Department of Transportation.
In 1922, maps promoting the area began to change, four years later this route became officially known as US Highway 89, and other towns, like Alton, pocketed through Johnson Canyon, grew into themselves, then faded. Sometimes I wonder if in the rush of progress and technology, the excitement of interstate connection and economic change, my great-great-grandfather thought about how much his road would alter people’s lives. Today, Alton’s sixty-five mile alternate route that connected Kanab to Northern Utah is now simply called, Country Road, an iconic name for a dirt road that barely registers on a map. I like to think that Henry knew what these choices would do and that he felt removing the tourist capital from Alton’s economy was worth it.

... As noted in History of Kane County, “probably the most important of all [parts of the history of roads in Kane County] has to do with the road over the sand dunes between Kanab and Long Valley.” My great-great-grandfather’s building project became the model for road building in other parts of Southern Utah. As he states in his 1928 autobiography:

Since completion of this road, there has been built a good road over the Sevier Divide down into Long Valley. The next year or two we will see a $1,000,000 road constructed from Zion’s National Park to Mt. Carmel, as also other roads linking up the scenic beauties of southern Utah and northern Arizona. This is of great value to the State of Utah, and of national interest. My road over the sand is the key to the whole situation. Without it, the other roads would never have been constructed. Based upon the engineer’s estimate of $400,000, the Kanab-Long Valley Road might not have been undertaken in this generation. I am very proud of this work, and feel that, though I may have fallen short in many things, this will always stand to my credit.

Henry’s major contribution to the accessibility of Kanab and to towns and cities northward would also lead to the extension of Highway 89 heading “southeastward over
trails and wagon roads leading from Kanab- Jacob Lake- Lee’s Ferry, [ending] with the building of a bridge across the Colorado River at Marble Canyon” in 1929. The bridge itself was an incredible accomplishment, now bypassing the historic Lee’s Ferry, which had shuttled cars, wagons, livestock and other people and commodities across the swift water of the Colorado River from 1872 to 1928. The Navajo Bridge, 467 feet above the river, provided a shorter, easier, and safer route for individuals traveling between states. They no longer had to descend steep roads to the riverbank but could bypass many of the most difficult areas near the Vermillion Cliffs.

Figure 12. Navajo Bridge with Vermillion Skyline. Melinda Rich. Photograph. 2009
Years later Highway 89 would be developed as a defense highway during the Cold War era to enable timely military supply shipments between states. This designation opened avenues for further funding and improvements to be made. More important to the economy of Kanab: advertisements that the highway “provided access to more national parks, monuments and popular recreation areas than any other route in North America,” establishing Kanab as a “strategic point on Trans-Continental Highway 89, leading from Canada to Mexico.” By the 1950s, tourism had become a permanent part of the local economies.

But I still wonder about those people in Alton, wonder about all the other towns in Utah or in the West, that sat along those first highways when federal money or consensus altered the route and established the official highway miles from their towns, a repeat of the decades earlier when railroad lines solidified prosperity along their tracks. How did the Alton townspeople feel as their economy slowed, was no longer hitched to the fast-paced changes brought on by automobile travel and tourism? Did they watch from their faraway pastures as tourists sped past, leaving clouds of heavy dust to settle over their cattle and fields? And then in the 1950s when dirt and oiled gravel were capped with asphalt and tar, did those changes seem even more permanent? Sometimes I wonder if these roads will change again, or someone will create a railroad line straight out to the North Rim, somehow bypassing our lodge at the gateway to the North Rim and leave our history to settle in the dust.

As I think about this possibility however, I am drawn back to the roads and to Jacob Lake’s position at a junction of these major highways stretching between states. Therein lies the difference. To put this scenario into perspective I am reminded of
something my Grandpa Bowman stated in his autobiography in 1974, the year before he died, “There’s never been a year since we’ve been at Jacob Lake that we haven’t increased the business. In 1930 people said they could travel just as cheap as they could stay at home.” And that was true. Even during the Depression, Grandpa Bowman continued to build onto the existing lodge structure and outbuildings. Their location and connection to the roads and the allure of the Grand Canyon’s beauty kept Jacob Lake in business during that financial crisis. But the history of my family would gain another layer of connection to these roads. In 1930, seven years after Grandpa Bowman and Mama Nina set up camp near the banks of Jacob Lake, after moving their lodge building to the new location at the junction Grandpa Bowman built in front of the lodge, after watching the prosperity of the developing tourist industry of Southern Utah and Northern Arizona continue to expand, they moved again.

Since their marriage in 1921, Grandpa Bowman and Mama Nina had raised their children, my grandmother Effie Dean and her brother, Harold Jr., in the small red-rock desert town of Kanab. But the year my grandmother turned seven, my great-grandparents moved their children north to Salt Lake so that they could attend the best schools available to them at the time. Grandmother and Uncle Harold took piano and acrobatic lessons, made new friends, attended church, and gained the education and experience that Mama Nina felt could only be attained in a city. But even after this move, as soon as the school year ended, she would pack the children, their summer essentials, and Zorabell Roundy (their school-year boarder from Kanab) into the car and travel the 350 miles to Jacob Lake to eagerly rejoin Grandpa Bowman for the summer tourist season. Beginning in 1930, Mama Nina set in place the pattern of movement up and down highway 89 and
the sections of road built by my ancestors, a pattern my extended family has followed ever since.

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We are nomadic, migratory, like winging birds, except that we fly south for the summer from Salt Lake City to Jacob Lake Inn. As a kid I used to wish we had a Star Trek transporter or sole access to some vortex that could transmit our perfectly packed car, people included, atom-by-atom to the parking lot in front of our lodge. We used to own planes, a Piper Cub and Comanche piloted by my grandad John Rich or by his brother-in-law, Harold. But that option ended tragically in the 1960s when my great-uncle crashed into a mountainside, after which my family took to the road once again, driving between these two lakes and the mountains and valleys we call home—our place.

Because of this lifestyle, in the twenty-seven years of my life, my family has killed five vehicles. They were like family pets: the Dirt Dog, the Blue Gerbil, the Midnight Marauder, all with personalities and quirks. We didn’t track their ages in years but in miles on the road. The Midnight Marauder, the most geriatric of our vehicles, was our 1984 Chevy Suburban, bought two years after I was born. It was painted a sparkling midnight blue due to yet another collision with a deer on a winding mountain road. As our family’s primary vehicle, he racked up over 700,000 miles in the fifteen years we had him. You would have thought he was a hypochondriac from all the repairs we had to make: two new engines, six transmissions, various side panels, windshields, almost one hundred tires. But the truth is we subjected him to this abuse, wore him down until he died in front of my best friend’s house dropping her off after class my junior year of high school.
As I think about it, I wish I could make an accurate count of the percentage of my life spent in the Marauder, in any of our vehicles, or in my extended family’s cars even, traveling the long lines of highway that connect our two homes together. It is probably a pitiful number, three percent. Much less impressive than I feel it should be, since that feeling of enclosure, being crowded together each summer with my family and watching the landscape slide past darkened windows, is pressed into most of my childhood memories. I remember wanting to freeze time, to stop that creeping, palpable awareness of my impermanence as I traveled through these seemingly unchanging places. But that uprooted feeling is what fuels my research now, connects me to the stories of the people, American Indians, homesteaders, cowboys, tourists, truck drivers, and locals, who have lived near or passed through the scenic backdrops of my family’s experience in the Grand Canyon region.

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I imagine Mama Nina sometimes, a mother with two young children, traveling in the 1930s down Utah’s unpredictable dirt roads. The distances between towns and especially gas stations were much greater back then. Vehicles available to the average person in the 1920s and 30s—Model Ts and the new Model A among others—were made with straight steel frames that didn’t absorb energy on impact. There were no seatbelts, air bags, or even reliable brakes and tires. Mama Nina would become a tire-changing expert, packing at least two spares, a patch kit, and a hand-powered air pump. There was no calling Triple A for a quick tow. Most routes didn’t have phone lines.

Depending on the season, the winding gravel roads could be washed out after summer monsoon storms, blocked by early spring snowdrifts and stretches of deep mud
and clay. To prevent mud holes, many sharp turns would be poorly banked, tilting toward the outside of the turn, convenient for draining but not for high-speed driving. My dad remembers Mama Nina pointing out the old highways as they drove down to Jacob Lake in the 1950s. The one-lane dirt roads snaked along the mountainsides, often high above the paved ones Mama Nina and my dad traveled down. I am sure she could still remember the feeling of every turn in the road. My grandmother told me that to make the trip from north to south, from Salt Lake to Jacob Lake, in twelve hours was considered pretty good time in the 20s. Once, Grandpa Bowman and his brother Deveroux made the trek in a blistering nine. They would have averaged forty-four miles per hour.

Despite the dangers and sacrifice of time and money during the early part of the Great Depression, Grandpa Bowman and Mama Nina drove back to the Kaibab each summer, leaving their friends and home in Salt Lake to begin the same seasonal process year after year. Grandpa went first, to open up the lodge, fix things, train employees, restock, while Mama Nina waited for the school year to end and drove the roads without male accompaniment, armed with her patch kit and confident determination to reach Jacob Lake in good time. I know she didn’t regret all the driving and moving each season. There was something about the experience, traveling though the dimming valleys toward Southern Utah’s plateaued horizons that she couldn’t give up, that continually drew her southward. She and Grandpa Bowman had made their choice.

... 

As a kid, before I started memorizing each turn of Highway 89, I remember sitting between my parents in the front seat of our Suburban, my head resting on the muscled arm of my dad while hearing my mom’s steady voice jostled by a bump in the
road. I felt a click in my dad’s shoulder as he moved his arm to stretch and I saw images from the stories my mom read: a tiny Indian jumping from a case on a wall, the bowing line of moonlit thread sliding between a princess’s fingertips, a man hanging hogtied from the heavy beam in a Utah family’s barn. These stories accompanied us on the drive, the shadowing expanses forming into dragon-guarded mountains full of skinwalkers and talking animals. Mom would read until our heads drooped or until she slurred to sleep, only waking to repeat the same line over and over, until we prodded, “Mom, you’ve already read that part!” She would smile, laugh a little, and read for a few pages, until her head leaned against the doorframe and mine slid softly in her lap.

When the light faded, or we grew restless, Dad would tell us stories as we drove. I am still amazed that he was able to maneuver sharp turns and weave stories together at the same time. Many of them were fables, formed from the animals and scenery we knew and recognized. They would teach us about kindness and honor, but others showed us the power of creativity and sneakiness. One of my favorites was a series of stories about a battling duo, the prairie dog, Zippity Zoomer (a character who originated with my grandad), and a rattlesnake, Snakey. Like Tom and Jerry, they played tricks on each other. Zippity Zoomer was crafty; his tricks were more cunning and at times I felt bad for Snakey. But Snakey was mean and vengeful. He never learned that Zoomer would stop his tricks if Snakey stopped his desire to eat him.

These stories and others like them had to be resolved so sometimes we reached Jacob Lake and had to unpack the car before we could hear the end. Our cousins, John, Julie, Laura, Sam, Katherine, Jennifer, the number depending on how many were there for the summer or a weekend, would run into our house, help us unload the car, and pile
onto my parents’ bed. My dad would have to start all over, Zippity Zoomer, Snakey, Scooter the Lizard, all characters my cousins knew well. My grandad John Rich would listen at the door, sometimes telling his own series of stories about an old prospector who when finding himself in trouble would often use dynamite to get himself out of scary situations or of a Navajo werewolf who would try and eat us if we did not cross the Navajo Bridge before sunset and were caught on the reservation after dark.

But during some of these drives, especially as we grew older, the dangerous stories were not fiction but family history that mirrored the landscape, travel narratives that came alive like scenes in a life-sized pop-up book as we passed our favorite fishing spot or broke into a wide valley flanked by mountains.

“Melinda, do you see that range in the distance, those tall volcanic peaks?” my dad said quietly, lifting his index finger from the steering wheel to point out the passenger side window.

“Yeah, Dad. The ones on the far side of the valley?” I replied, looking into his face, sensing his changing mood.

“I don’t think I have ever pointed them out to you before. That is where Uncle Harold’s plane went down on his way to Salt Lake to pick up your grandmother in the 60s. He was supposed to meet your Uncle Chris and Harold Jr. too. They were just boys, ten maybe.”

“I didn’t know it was just right there. I’ve driven past so many times.”

“Funny how that happens, isn’t it?” he said. “Sometimes we drive right past things without knowing what they mean to our lives.”
“Which mountain is it, Dad? Do you know which one it was?” I said, leaning forward to focus on the details.

He pointed out the window, “It’s Mount Dutton, the tallest one, named like so many other places out here after people who surveyed this open landscape. We all speculate that Uncle Harold must have put the plane on autopilot and then fell asleep. He almost made it over, missed the top by less than 100 feet. I think about that sometimes passing here, how close he was, that your grandmother had asked him not to come. And then he didn’t.”

“How did they find him? Did someone see his plane go down?” I said, searching for some tiny evidence of the crash along the heavily wooded slope.

“Your grandad and Jim Glover flew in the Super Cub to find him. I can’t imagine being your grandad, circling high above, the only one who knew the routes Uncle Harold took, and then drawing closer, saw the burning trees and smoking wreckage of his brother-in-law.”

I turned my face to him, my eyes blurry. Dad still stared out the window.

“Your grandad stayed in the air, led the ground team by radio to the crash site where Jim helped retrieve the body. They drove for miles on a rough road that eventually just ended. It stopped miles before the crash and the men on the ground had to hike up the volcanic rocks to the wreckage. They found him there just feet from the plane, mostly intact.”

“Sometimes things just happen like that don’t they, Dad? Just end, like the road, like Uncle Harold.”
“Yeah they can end, Minda, but now you know where it was and how it happened. Now you won’t forget.”

...
mind, stories I will never know, from those summer trips with her children, venturing through the long stretches of sagebrush and open sky, as she passed the landmarks she filled with stories. I imagine her pointing out to my grandmother the maples and oaks shaking like crimson fire in the sun, telling Uncle Harold of adventures from her first travels up and down the state, relating the accounts of her parents and ancestors who made similar migrations from across the country to settle these arid distances. I am sure she told of near misses with passing cars, collisions with deer and livestock, flat tires and whiteout snowstorms, all of which she and Grandpa Bowman survived. These are experiences I know well. These are our stories, packed away with the luggage.

As I travel between homes, I do not worry that the car will break down, that I will hit a deer, because eventually those accidents are going to happen. When you drive a car with more than 300,000 miles on the odometer, it becomes more a matter of when you will break down than if you will. I don’t worry about the hours it will take to get to Jacob Lake either. I know how long it will be because I have three hours left when I am near the mountains outside Scipio that remind me of the Scottish Highlands. I am nearing Panguitch because that is the turn where Uncle Harold flipped the car over into the river, but still kept his hat on. I am almost to Kanab because I am driving on my great-great-grandfather’s road.

These distances know my heartache, my dangerous ability to drive through the lens of my camera, and my conversations with cousins and brothers who have made me laugh until I snort, with whom I speculate about the future of Jacob Lake’s expanding business.
I have often wondered why my family continues this trek, sometimes over twenty
times throughout the summer tourist season and into the fall. And why the rest of our
family doesn’t move closer to Jacob Lake, as have my two uncles in St. George. But as I
drive, watching the highway towns grow larger or smaller, viewing pioneer buildings
leaning toward collapse, and remembering the time I saw a glimmering white toilet bowl
atop a pillar of purpled volcanic rock, I know that to stop driving these roads means to
risk forgetting the places and people I have come from. My family’s stories are the
framework of my life experience, and their place-based tellings tie me to the land I travel
through. As my great-uncle Harold once said, “I am neither a city kid, or a country boy, I
am the best of both worlds.” We track the patterns of our lives on these roads and though
we know where our homes are, like the thousands of people who have traveled down
these roads our lives are changed by the places in-between.
CHAPTER 4
GRAND CANYON KEEPER

The greatest charm of the Kaibab Plateau and the entire region is the isolation. Each turn of the road reveals hidden places of unexpected beauty. Whether you spend a day, a week, or a whole summer in this area, you will have to return again and again to satisfy your thirst for this loveliest of spots.

- Las Vegas Sun, 1985

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While flipping through the contents of a box in the Grand Canyon Museum Collection at the South Rim I opened the only folder I had come across entitled “History of the North Rim.” As I opened the folder, I was surprised to see my mom’s face smiling up at me, along with my dad, oldest brother, Steve, and my Uncle John and Aunt Kristi and their son John III, seated in the old lobby of our lodge. I had seen this magazine article before. My grandmother owns a copy of every article she knows of describing the scenery or experiences we have lived near the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. But I never imagined that this file of articles about our family would come to represent the history of the North Rim. As I read through the paper clippings, I began to understand my family’s relationship to the Grand Canyon. One article in particular from Arizona Highways Magazine, “The Most Pleasant 44 Miles in America” highlighted this relationship even in its title; the story of this road begins at Jacob Lake. “Forty-four miles,” the article states, “that’s the entire length of Arizona State Highway 67. On the north end, it branches from U.S. 89A at Jacob Lake. On the South, it terminates at the doorstep of Grand Canyon Lodge, on the North Rim. Without a doubt, it is one of the most pleasant 44 miles in America, maybe the world.”

Our business cards, website, and other forms of advertisement make our relationship to the Grand Canyon clear, each includes the phrase “Jacob Lake Inn, Gateway to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.” In a sense you could call us the gatekeepers to the North Rim, the local color you can ask for directions or the best places to eat. I can guarantee someone in my family or one of the college students we hire for the summer will send you out the door with a map, a suggestion for the best viewpoint at sunset (Cape Royal), some homemade cookies, and maybe a Navajo rug.
The drive along this highway is surprising. It rises and falls in elevation through thick "hallways of 100-foot-high red-barked ponderosa pine interwoven with stands of ivory-trunked quaking aspen" which open into wide tree-rimmed meadows of grass and wild flowers. In recent years, some sections of the road are pockmarked and lined with thousands of acres of bleached and burned tree trunks, the remnants of fire policy gone wrong. But in the early morning and evening, herds of mule deer, the Kaibab squirrel and other wildlife can be seen foraging for food amongst the trees and in the meadows. And then unexpectedly, the forest ends, the meadows are gone, and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon opens in a pop of crimson, purple, and orange.

The Arizona Highways article makes another interesting point about this road branching out from Jacob Lake, it stating that “what makes Highway 67 so worthwhile is not the road itself, but the sphere through which it flows.” To me it seems wrong to exclude the road itself from the descriptions of its scenery and the history that surrounds it. It is the road that formed their story and led to this final description of the Kaibab Plateau:

“One aficionado, who spends most of his free time exploring this pleasant land, has a nice way of describing [the drive]: “God spent five days creating all the marvels of the world and formed this section on the sixth day for a haven in which He could rest on the seventh.”

I am sure anyone who has traveled Highway 67 in mid-June or early October would definitely agree with Arizona Highways’ sentiments. But on those days when the monsoon rains drop from the sky in heavy bursts or when the first snow falls in two to three-foot increments, I wonder how those early tourists and my great-grandparents felt about the distance to the Grand Canyon or those wide, open meadows.
As news and travel accounts from tourists in the late-1800s such as Mark Twain or explorers such as Major John Wesley Powell made their way to newspapers across the country, the popularity of their tales brought many individuals westward in search of adventure and possibility, a progression that “linked transcontinental travel with the process of westward expansion.” Only a year before the official settlement of Kanab, Powell, with artist Thomas Moran and others, made his descent into what he coined “the Great Unknown.” Leaving Green River City, Wyoming on May 24, 1869, this band of men journeyed through interior of the Grand Canyon, hundreds of miles of sandstone and granite and the earth’s geological history. This expedition, which “consisted mainly of adventurers” and though it was not as scientifically sound as the Army Corps surveys of
earlier decades and areas, it still caused Powell to “[emerge] from the Grand Canyon a hero and a celebrity, a kind of nineteenth-century astronaut… [who]…painted a series of word pictures of the West’s greatest natural wonder.” Powell had conquered one of the nation’s formidable landscapes and through the publication of his book originally titled *Report of the Exploration of the Columbia River of the West and Its Tributaries* (1875) had solidified the Grand Canyon in the hearts of nineteenth century Americans.

Although few could afford to travel across country to see such natural splendors, stagecoaches and pack trains took hundreds to visit these landscapes even before suitable roads were made through the area. In 1872, three years after Powell’s expedition, President Ulysses S. Grant created Yellowstone, the world’s first National Park, transforming tourism into the new industry of the West, which brought with it road improvements and increased accessibility to these natural attractions. With this new surge of publicity, and the completion of the Trans-Continental Railroad at Promontory, Utah on May 10, 1869, interestingly the same year and month as Powell’s expedition, thoughts of expanding the budding tourist industry at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon had begun. But as Hal Rothman states in *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West*, “In the 1880s few Anglo Americans had seen the Grand Canyon. The primary conveyance of the era, the railroad, did not cross northern Arizona, restricting the opportunities for all but the most intrepid.” Not until 1882, when the Santa Fe Railroad passed through Williams, Arizona to Flagstaff was there an effective link between the South Rim and the greater American public. But even with that connection, travelers still rode wagons or pack horses sixty miles to the rim, “a day-long stage coach ride on rutted roads that departed three times each week from Flagstaff” during most of the year.
These first experiences were provided mainly by private enterprises and were limited to only the adventurous and wealthy with a stagecoach ticket costing $20.00 per person. The railroad increased accessibility to the South Rim and made travel during the coldest and warmest seasons manageable for a greater number of people, expanding the tourist industry by degrees. Lodges began popping up along the rim. Stagecoach lines transported tourists to various points of interest and prospects along the rim. The canyon trails themselves were expanded. Bright Angel Trail, originally a track used by the Havasupai Tribe, was widened to accommodate the mules hauling supplies and tourists down into the canyon. Likewise, roads to and from the canyon were expanded and improved. And soon, “professionals replaced the smallest and most idiosyncratic operators,” a trend that would continue to this day where private owners give way to government organizations and international corporations. With this change of guards came the influx of investors, their capital, and the prospect of a railroad branch to the South Rim itself. On September 17, 1901 the first railroad trip, furnished by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company, linked Williams to the South Rim.

This connection changed the dynamic of Grand Canyon tourism at the South Rim. Now leisure tourists from the eastern United States and countries around the world could converge at the Grand Canyon in relative comfort. The Fred Harvey Company along with the Santa Fe Railroad “built the popular El Tovar Hotel in 1904 and it became famous the world over for its unique location and its sumptuous (for 1904) accommodations.” This combination of accessibility, year-long comfortable accommodations, and the wily advertising of Harvey and the Santa Fe Railroad made the South Rim of the Grand Canyon one of the major destinations for tourist travel in the West at the turn of the
twentieth century. The North Rim, in contrast, would be decades behind in accommodations and accessibility up until the mid-1920s.

As with the early days at the South Rim, it would take the creativity and determination of the locals and outside capital to build and improve roads to the North Rim. Because of its relative remoteness and heavy snowfall in the winter, the expansion of roads and industry progressed slowly. While the railroad would connect the South Rim to Williams in 1901, Kanab was just beginning its process of development. Grand Canyon historian Michael F. Anderson explains this disparity with an account made by Francois Emile Matthes, topographic mapmaker for the United States Geological Survey, who related that “while travelers on the South Rim in 1902 enjoyed railways, wagon roads, and hotels, Matthes found only animal paths, week-long saddle treks to and from Kanab for supplies, and the great outdoors” on the North Rim.

Although the Grand Canyon was officially designated a National Park in 1919, the tourist industry at the North Rim officially drew large crowds only in 1929 after the completion of the Navajo Bridge which spans the Colorado River. With the added ability for interstate travel over the Navajo Bridge and the government’s financial backing for road construction in many Western states, towns like Kanab and Fredonia saw an influx of tourists in the area. As the popularity of the North Rim grew, locally-made postcards and pamphlets as well as the more widely distributed advertising materials by the Harvey Company, Detroit Publishing Company, and Frasher’s Fotos made their way into the hands of travelers and into the mailboxes of their friends and families. These
advertisements began to create a distinction between the views of the North Rim and the South Rim, drawing larger numbers of people through Kanab to the more remote side.

With the institution of these major improvements to the infrastructure of Southern Utah, tourism flourished. Although a direct branch of the railroad, like that on the South Rim, was never established, “the Union Pacific (UP) Railroad…served North Rim visitors with motor-coach service from the UP depot in Cedar City, Utah,” as did early outfits such as the Utah-Arizona Parks Transportation Co. This service began a “circle tourism route” in 1928 transporting tourists to the three major national parks surrounding Kanab. Departing from Cedar City along the Cedar Canyon road, guests of these “multi-day motor-coach tours” traveled along the newly established highways between Cedar Breaks, Bryce and Zion Canyons, and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, all for $89.50.

The 1930s would be an era of major road improvements and expansion. Like great-great-grandfather Henry’s road over the sand, travel routes connecting major National Parks and Monuments spread through the state and extended into Northern Arizona over the Kaibab Plateau, through Houserock Valley, and across the Navajo Bridge into the Navajo Nation, making it possible for tourists to view both sides of the Grand Canyon with relative speed.

... I am sure I look like a tourist, notebook in hand, scribbling down impressions and descriptions of the real tourists I encounter here. But this junction fascinates me, makes me feel like a gatekeeper to the shadowing canyon below. I am seated on my rock, the one that over the years seems to have fit to my frequent sittings. It is situated at the final
junction of the Bright Angel Trail, on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. To my right the trail forks to a packed parking lot, to the left the Bright Angel and Thunderbird Lodges. In front of me, a stone-lined track descends into the darkening distance along 24-miles of trail and switchbacks connecting both sides of the Canyon together. Normally, I sit here possibly three times a year, sometimes more, waiting for family members and employees to climb the final switchbacks out of the Canyon after hiking Rim-to-Rim so I can shuttle them back to our lodge three hours away. But this trip I actually stayed near the rim, in Tuysayan, five miles away. I have been researching the Grand Canyon all day in their historical archives, looking for evidence of my family’s role in the history of the North Rim.

From my rock, looking across more than fourteen miles of fractured sandstone, limestone, quartzite, and shale, I can picture similar seats of stone I claim at the various edges of the North Rim. It seems I have been collecting viewpoints on both rims, places where I can imagine I know what it is like to confront the Grand Canyon for the first time. For most people who pause here at the beginning of Bright Angel Trail, this isn’t their first view. They have stopped possibly seven times along Highway 64 at Mather Point and Yavapai, packed together with busloads of foreign travelers, taking in the splendor and color, that initial feeling of not knowing if what is before them is real or just a fantastic illusion. Or maybe they have come from the secluded North Rim, my rim, with its ancient meadows, sweeping views, and unique rock formations. They may have been the only people at Cape Royal, more than one hundred and eighty degrees of cloud and canyon with only the wind, darting birds, and the fading light of sunset around them.
First views are almost never seen there at Cape Royal. The anticipation that builds while driving the sixty-five miles from Jacob Lake is often too far for most tourists to travel to see the Canyon for the first time. Many people get impatient, drive from Jacob Lake right to the Grand Canyon Lodge to see what the North Rim has to offer. Actually, I usually tell them to go the lodge first and save the best viewpoint for last. At Cape Royal they can be attacked by the senses, feel the anticipation as they drive the narrow road winding over ridges and through forested valleys, spying glimpses of the canyon through the trees.

A few years ago I walked behind a woman on the paved path to Cape Royal. She kept to the trail as it wound through scrubby trees and eroding washes, stopping to read each of the signs posted next to pinyon pines and a blooming cliff rose and yelling for her daughter to catch up. She kept her head down, watching for signs until the corridor of pinyons to her right broke into a tree-framed vista of the Grand Canyon bathed in a hazy golden light.

“Holy Shit! Mary?” she shouted, stopping abruptly in place. “Mary! Get over here!”

“What? Mama, did you see one of those squirrels they were talking about at the lodge?”

“No, girl. It’s what we came for, that picture postcard. Hurry up, take my picture!” She pulled a small camera from the fanny pack at her hip.

Anticipating this moment, I grinned and walked toward the woman and her fumbling daughter.

“Would you like me to take a picture of the two of you?”
“Why sure, Hun. Thanks.” She tugged her daughter’s arm to turn her toward the camera. “Now smile, girl. This is the money shot.”

I laughed behind the cover of her camera and framed them in front of the gilded mesas and gathering clouds. “Great picture, though if you are feeling adventurous there is an even better picture just a little further ahead.”

“Well, then, lead the way!”

We walked toward the fence at the farthest edge of the rim. As I got closer, I decided she wouldn’t be all that excited to follow me over the fence to my usual spot, so I stopped and let them look at the panorama.

“Yeah, that sure is beautiful,” she said stretching the words in her mouth as she scanned the horizon and from left to right. “You can see all the way around.”

“Mama, is that the Colorado River? They said we could see it from here at the Visitor’s Center.”

Her mother looked at me for the answer. I nodded in confirmation.

“Sure is, girl. Come here, and we’ll get this nice lady to take our picture again.”

I framed them once more, the curve of the Colorado just over the daughter’s right shoulder.

“Thanks, Hun. That was real nice of you. You want me to get one for you?” she pointed toward the large camera bag hanging from my shoulder.

“That’s all right” I said, “I’ve got plenty of photos of myself from here. But thank you. I am just going to go take some pictures before the sun sets all the way.”

Moving to the right side of the fence, I took off my camera bag, placed it atop a boulder on the other side of the fence, and then, lifting my right leg first through the gap,
I bent myself under the waist high railing, pulled the other leg through, took my camera bag from the rock, and strapped it over my shoulder once again.

“Now you sure you wanna do that?!” I heard my friend yell from behind me. She gripped the fence with both hands and gave me a concerned look. “You could fall right off.”

I laughed to myself. “Thanks for your concern, really. But I come here all the time. I’ve learned to be careful. I promise.“

“Well, I’m not coming to find you if you fall,” she said, half joking, and turned toward her daughter. “Now don’t you start getting any ideas. You are staying on this side of that bar!”

I turned from them so I didn’t have to see the daughter’s disappointed look and moved between boulders worn smooth from shoes and hands. As the view began to expand, I brushed my hand down the trunk of the dead tree near the first two-foot drop toward the rim, stepped down the ledges and stone blocks until I came to my favorite spot. There were a few people scattered across the outcrop but no one sat on the ledge I feel is the perfect distance from the rim. I leaned back against the limestone block, my feet and ankles hanging over the canyon, taking out my camera. I sat for an hour, listening to the wind rustle the feathers of birds darting from ledge to ledge and clicking pictures of the golden haze that hung between the layered mesas just below the setting sun and clouds blushing orange and pink across a darkening blue sky towards the South Rim.

...
At the end of this research trip, sitting here on my rock at the South Rim I can’t help but think of the difference between the sides of the Grand Canyon. The woman and her daughter at Cape Royal on the North Rim had driven for at least 400 miles from an airport in Las Vegas or Salt Lake, passing through Kanab or Fredonia, through the sagebrush desert and up the Kaibab Plateau, possibly stopping for cookies or lunch at Jacob Lake Inn, and then winding through the ponderosas and meadows to capture the high views of the North Rim. But here on the South Rim tourists can take a train from Williams to reach the canyon, cutting off almost sixty miles of driving, or join a three-day bus tour from Phoenix, Vegas, or even Flagstaff, all year round, while the North Rim where Highway 67 is closed for almost half of the year. No wonder ten times more people visit the South Rim annually.

It takes more effort and planning to stay at the North Rim. I don’t know how many times I have told visitors that the North Rim is closed until May 15th every year—and then follow up with “No, I am not joking.” There are no buses shuttling people from viewpoint to viewpoint, only three hotels (including Jacob Lake Inn), and unlike the East and West Rim drives on the South Rim that skirt the edge of the canyon for forty miles, the North Rim has only one way in and one way out. When someone comes to the North side, whether now or a century back, they have to be prepared, know where they are going, and hope if they run out of water or gas, they know how and where to find more, or who to ask.

That doesn’t seem to be the case here on the South side. As I am watching the sunset mirrored in the windows of Kolb Gallery to my right, I see a man, obviously European, in his dark trouser socks, stylish sandals, and man capris, lightly step down the
manure-bordered trail toward me. In his hands are dangling white shopping bags, reading “Thank You For Shopping,” bags that shake with his steps, but as he stops only three feet from my rock, the look on his face makes me wonder if there is more behind that shaking. He glances to me and looks down at his bags, which I now see are full of water bottles and what looks like a package of trail mix. I have seen that look before, stretched across the faces of our employees each fall. He plans to “Hike the Grand Canyon,” something he probably read about in his guidebook or was told to do by friends who had hiked it themselves. The man takes a deep breath, gives me a nod, and walks down the first log-braced step. The trail winds down the canyon walls and though I can’t see him, I can hear those shaking bags every time he rounds the closest switchbacks.

My mind begins to flip through the hundreds of documents and pictures I had been scouring a few hours before at the Grand Canyon Museum and Archives. Some were images of tourists in high-collared dresses, hats and gloves shading them from the bright sun. I have seen some of these images reproduced as postcards for sale at the different lodges here at the South Rim. We even sold a few of them on a larger scale, matted and framed in our Gift Shop at Jacob Lake. These Victorian women stood feet away from the edge, one balancing on a single leg, smiling at the photographer, exultant, giddy at what they were seeing after a journey I imagine had taken them at least three days by wagon to stand precariously where they did. I guess if the balancing woman fell it would have been a glamorous way to die.

I even found photos of President Teddy Roosevelt during his first trip to the North Rim. My favorite shows him lying on his belly next to a fellow traveler, their arms folded behind their backs, faces leaning over the lip of a small water hole to drink from the clear
water in the middle, an effective way to avoid upsetting the silt at the bottom. Roosevelt and his sons and nephew hired members of the Grand Canyon Transportation Company, owned by Edwin D. Woolley and other townspeople of Kanab, Utah, to guide them across the Grand Canyon for a hunting trip at the North Rim. Hiking through the Grand Canyon was much faster—by more than a week—than taking any of roads or trails available at the time. Although at times the trip was ill-fated—a lightning storm shot bolts of lightning all around the metal tram cage (ordered through Henry Bowman’s mercantile business) that stretched across the Colorado River as it pulled Roosevelt across—the President’s experience led him to safeguard the Grand Canyon as a Game Preserve and later a National Monument. Finally, in 1919, Woodrow Wilson made the Grand Canyon a National Park.

But I still wonder about the man with the plastic bags. He obviously desires to embark on the epic journey to “Hike the Grand Canyon,” to do what I am sure many people, books, and travel series described in colorful detail. I hope he doesn’t plan to hike Rim-to-Rim, a series of trails and switchbacks that from my rock stretch twenty-four miles down the cliff-side and tributary canyons, across the Colorado River and up the steep switchbacks to the North Rim, 1,000 feet higher. It takes preparation, physical and mental strength. Those men and women pictured in early Grand Canyon photographs had already proved through their rough wagon travel and outdoor living that if they ventured down into the canyon’s depths, they might come back out alive. My friend with the shopping bags might have taken the train—little preparation needed. Would a few water bottles be enough for what he planned to do? I guess those early tourists didn’t have the luxury of being life-flighted out.
Two hours later, however, I hear those plastic bags, bouncing steadily, lighter. I see the top of his dark, curly-haired head turn the corner to what is now the last switchback, his perspiring face glowing with pride. He conquered the Grand Canyon, and it looks like he still has his trail mix. I smile at him widely and he grins, says a heaving “Thank you,” turns the corner, and is gone, the bouncing bags as grateful as he is. I laugh out of relief and humor at his “thank you,” as if I somehow allowed him to hike. But as I look down the twisting trail toward my side of the canyon, thinking of the people for whom I take pictures at Cape Royal, or the people to whom I tell the history of my family’s business, or with whom I share travel tips or the history of the North Rim, that acknowledgement felt almost right.

... My parents tell me I was months old the first time I visited the Grand Canyon. My family was living at Jacob Lake Inn the summer I was born. Sometimes I like to think of my first experience of the North Rim as a kind of rite of passage, a ceremony confirming my connection to the arid and beautiful landscapes of the West. More likely, though, my mom gripped me tightly as she stood at the edge, the corner of my blanket flapping in wind, and watched my older brothers climb over fenced in boulders with my dad. I imagine she took in the view like she does now, slowing turning the arc of the 180-degree panorama in front of her, soaking in the details and color and whispering to me of the importance this bright and widening landscape already held in our family’s lives. I don’t know if she remembers that first outing or each of the countless other times we have walked the curving path to Cape Royal together or stood on the rocky outcrop at Point Sublime. It doesn’t exactly matter if she remembers every detail because the rim is
always there, a place we can easily visit over and over again to redefine our memories together.

It is strange to me that even though we have frequent exposure to the Grand Canyon, though its tourists sustain my family’s business, and though it feels like an ever-present backdrop for the events in our lives, I find I can never quite claim the rim itself as my home. The North Rim is my side of the Grand Canyon, a distinction I make clear to anyone I speak to about it. But there is always a road between me and the Canyon. I have never spent more than a day tracking the angular shadows of mesa tops and cliff faces. I have never slept a night in a cabin along the rim. In that sense—the length of time spent in one spot—I, too, am a tourist to the Grand Canyon. But we are also different. I am a local and can pay the fee at the entrance to the National Park with Jacob Lake cookies. I have sat atop the same boulders hundreds of times and have never seen a sunset duplicated in intensity or color from any of the viewpoints branching out from Highway 67. But just like the tourists who visit these expansive landscapes where miles separate towns and gas stations, eventually I will walk to my car and drive the forty-four miles back to Jacob Lake through moonlit meadows and herds of deer.

It is the road that links all the North Rim tourists together, traveling Highway 67 which bisects the wide meadows once grazed by cattle and overpopulated herds of deer, or old logging roads winding through thousands of acres of forest once used by locals to reach remote viewpoints until in recent years too-dense trees and “controlled” forest fires left miles of dead and charred trees and ash that rain swept into the Canyon and turned the Colorado River black for days. The Grand Canyon is the attraction for tourists and
travelers to this area of the Southwest, but Highway 67 is the guide telling one version of the history of the North Rim.

Figure 16. Kaibab Mountain Road by Harold I. Bowman. Photograph. Circa 1935.

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“So, the road that Edwin D. Woolley and his nephew took out to the canyon from Jacob Lake in 1909 is basically in the same place as it is now?” I said to my grandmother one afternoon last summer as I helped her go through a plastic milk crate full of framed photographs of regional historical figures and our ancestors, photos used to hang in the
Jacob Lake Inn lobby. I had spent most of the morning visiting Kanab’s Heritage Museum and found the folder marked “Transportation” to be lacking any definitive information on the first route out to the North Rim. My grandmother scanned the notebook into which she had been writing dates and names and then looked up at me, peering through her reading glasses.

“Well, not exactly. See, by the time I remember traveling on the first highway there were hundreds of roads spreading all over the Kaibab Plateau. There were logging and mining camps here on top. They did a lot of the processing nearby or in Fredonia,” my grandmother said, leaning forward, resting her arm on top of the piled papers and pencils that filled the long middle drawer of her desk. She swiveled in her chair so she was now looking at me headlong.

“That first road was just an extension of a cowboy trail, used by Grand Canyon Cattle Company and others, “ she added, then paused to think. “It was probably a trail used by deer or even the Paiutes who thinned the trees and farmed in the meadows before the cowboys began ranching throughout the forest. You can’t travel on some of those roads anymore. The Forest Service closed them off. The old highway has rockslides and trees growing right in the middle of the road.”

“But does Highway 67 follow the same route it did before, through the meadows and canyons, or did it come up another way?” I asked, clarifying my question, hoping my grandmother would be of more help than the books I had been reading about development of the Grand Canyon region. So far none of them could tell me exactly where the road went to the North Rim.
“It is basically the same. Some of the cowboys and local people taking tourists out to the Canyon from Kanab probably took the routes they liked, not particularly the one that is paved now. I don’t think all of them went straight through the old meadows like they do now,” my grandmother said, taking another photograph from the crate at her feet. “Sometimes it would depend on the weather though. I would imagine they would stay closer to the shade during the hottest months and keep out of the meadows when the melting snow had made those streams and lakes through all the valleys in the spring.”

“Yeah, I have seen some of those roads. They are faint, but in some of the clearings you can just make them out,” I said, picturing the seasonal snow-fed streams filling up the tracks of fading roads, imprinting them onto the landscape each year.

“So a lot of those first roads were made by loggers and miners from Kanab and Fredonia?”

“Yes. There was quite a community up on the Kaibab. My brother and I used to play in the sawdust piles outside the sawmill at Three Lakes. We first went with Dad, but then we would ride our horses over as we got older. We would climb as high as we could. Harold ate handfuls of the stuff.”

I laughed. I had seen the pictures of Grandmother and her younger brother nesting on mountains of sawdust like birds or deer bedding down at night, a body-shaped shelf perched part way up the sliding hillside.

“But it was the Forest Service that expanded Uncle Dee’s road, in 1913. I read that they thought it would prevent people from getting lost on all the logging roads. Which makes sense to me,” I said, imagining one of the times my cousin Hannah and I got lost in the forest trying to see if we could find a viewpoint we had never been to.
“Good thing there is a system to the roads, though. There are roads in canyons and on ridges. Find a ridge and head uphill. It will lead to a main road. But I guess early tourists didn’t know that,” I added. “I guess most people still don’t.”

“I think you are right. And not many groups of people came through in cars without a local guide. Some tried it, but they would always ask about the best routes. I remember some people getting turned around right in front of our first lodge.”

“The one just up the hill from the lake before the road was moved?” I asked, making sure I could duplicate the picture in her head.

“Yes. A family had stopped to ask directions to the Canyon and once they got in their car they drove right back down the road they come in on. Someone must have run after them. I just remember thinking they were silly.”

“Sounds like people are the same as they always have been,” I replied. “I have seen tourists do the same thing now.”

Grandmother smiled at this and circled back to our original conversation. “Things would have felt a lot more remote then. It wasn’t until my grandfather built the section of Highway 89 and they finished the Navajo Bridge that people really started coming out. Your great-grandfather said they pumped 1,000 gallons of gasoline the weekend they opened the bridge. The year before, in 1928 or so, they considered pumping 50 gallons of gasoline in a day to be pretty good. And even before the bridge opened, the Union Pacific buses started tours to the North Rim from Cedar City. They started those only a few years after I was born.”

“So by 1927, buses were coming past Jacob Lake and the first lodge that Mama Nina and Grandpa Bowman had built up the hill from the lake?” I clarified again.
“Right. That first highway by the lake was maintained by the Forest Service and then in 1930 they changed the route and it came up the Kaibab like it does now, up the high ridge of the mountain, like a backbone.”

“That is a good way to put it,” I said, picturing Highway 89 climbing and descending the sixty-mile spine of the Kaibab as it follows the ribs of ridges and valleys until it flattens out into the meadows near Kaibab Lodge toward the North Rim. “Didn’t they have to blast a lot of rock as they got near the rim? I remember reading that the road Uncle Dee took was really bad near the end.”

“I think it was. It gets much rockier and the ravines are steeper there.”

“It’s funny to me, Grandmother, how the highway changed everything. I mean, we moved the lodge, more people traveled to the North Rim, tent cities popped up along the Rim, lodges were built, all of it linked to Highway 67 and taking people to the Rim.”

My grandmother kept her head bent for a moment, penning another name, or note on paper to help her identify the people in the photographs. She looked up at me, her brown eyes focusing on my face.

“Well, that is the way some people tell the history. But when I was younger not everything was about the Grand Canyon, or tourism. We serviced all those people traveling, but there were local people here. Forest Service workers, miners, loggers, cowboys. Most books won’t tell you about those people though. They weren’t at the Rim so it didn’t matter as much. Their lives would have been like anyone else’s living in a rural town.”

“Or like anyone living at that time in remote areas like this whether in Arizona, or Utah, or Idaho or anywhere else.” I added.
“Yes. That sounds right. Most people’s stories are the same. We just happen to have the Grand Canyon in our backyard. And for some of the people, like my Grandfather Bowman, or Edwin D. or my parents when they started Jacob Lake, the Grand Canyon changed things, but not for everyone.”

I pulled another framed photo out of the crate and thought about that for a moment, thought of the cowboys who herded cattle in the meadows on the Kaibab, how it would have been impossible to miss the gaping hole in the ground. But even though it was beautiful, it didn’t relate to their work. Our family, some of the people pictured in the photograph I held, saw the Grand Canyon as more than just “a hell of a place to lose a cow” as Ebeneezer Bryce said of Bryce Canyon. The Grand Canyon and building a road out to reach it was vital to our history, but I don’t think I had always seen it that way.

“Grandmother, that reminds me of a story my dad told me.”

She looked up from her photo, raising her eyebrows for me to continue. “When Robbie was about three years old, my dad took him to see the Grand Canyon, hoping to view it from his perspective. He wanted to learn from his childlike wisdom. At the Rim, Dad asked, ‘Robbie, what do you see?’ My little brother, standing there at the edge, looked down at the ground and announced in the same hopeful tone, ‘I see…a bug.’”

My grandmother laughed at that, her reading glasses slipping down her nose. “I don’t think your dad expected to hear Robbie say that.”

I shook my head, “I don’t either. But I think that’s how it works. I mean, I don’t suppose your grandfather Bowman thought his road over the sand would change things, or the cowboys at the rim thought their herding trails would turn into roads that catered to tourists. They didn’t think the Grand Canyon would make any difference.”
“Well, what your Dad experienced was a sense of perspective, of seeing how things can change depending on how you look at it. Not everyone is willing to look up or down.”

“Right,” I said, growing excited as I could feel the connections between the history I studied and my own life coming together. “He tapped into the expectation that surrounds the Grand Canyon. That we expect to be thrilled beyond sense, to feel miniscule and panoramic at the same time, but don’t always realize that there is more going on than we can see or feel in that moment.”

My grandmother grinned at my enthusiasm.

“That’s right. For some people that kind of perspective, seeing the possibility of the Grand Canyon, seeing the changes they could help bring about would change their lives. Edwin D. Woolley went from being a cowboy to an entrepreneur rather quickly after seeing the Grand Canyon for the first time. For others, it life went on just the same.”

“And that is the scary part.” I said rubbing the side of the frame in my lap. “It makes me wonder how many times I have sat on the edge of something without ever really knowing it.”
CHAPTER 5

AT THE CROSSROADS: A CONCLUSION

The structure of a road system—tree-like in form—is composed of the trunk extending outward to the limbs and from them the smaller branches all of great importance to its proper functioning.

- History of Highway Development in Utah

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Figure 17. Harold and Nina Bowman and Their Two Children Effie Dean and Harold Jr. Building Jacob Lake Inn by Unknown Photographer. Photograph. Circa 1929.
On a researching trip to the South Rim last fall I found myself vying for space to snap the perfect photograph of the dimming canyon. As I stood in the crowded courtyard outside the Bright Angel Lodge, the battery light on my camera had once again started blinking. Knowing that it was lying, I took the battery out and snapped it back in place, the bar now reading “full power.” However, after one more picture, it went dead. “Bah!” I mumbled. I knew I would have all of the next day to take pictures along the East Rim drive and since the view from Lipan and Mather Points was better than the perspective of the lodge, missing a few shots tonight wouldn’t be too big a deal.

But as I watched the people sitting along the stone walls that flanked the canyon rim, I wondered how many of them had the luxury of knowing what the Grand Canyon would look like tomorrow or be able to stop at each point for hours if they pleased. And how many individuals could say it didn’t matter if their camera stopped working, I always have tomorrow. What if today was their tomorrow, their only chance to see the canyon? What would they do? With the change in technology over the past ten years, a disposable camera even at the Grand Canyon was becoming a rare find. These hypothetical pictureless tourists would be left with only the trusty postcards covering walls inside the lodges and gift shops that lined the rims as a way to have a visual representation of their vacation. Spread out like color swatches at a paint store, each postcard depicts a different perspective, season, change in light, filter effect, or the ever-reaching rays of a sunspot.

In On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place, Lucy Lippard describes postcards as “photographic clichés” which “provide a lens that facilitates and reinforces ersatz or limited experience.” She suggests that many tourists will refrain from
photographing their own experience and opt for what some might call “a better picture” printed on a postcard or know the difference between the views they are purchasing, some of which are only seen on the North and West sides of the Canyon. It seems that even if you happen to be at the Grand Canyon on the one day in the week it is full of fog or a whiteout snowstorm, you will always be able to find the representation of the Grand Canyon that most fits your expectation. Lippard calls this the “consensus of what viewers hope to see.” People come to the Grand Canyon and through these printed photographs of sunsets, wildlife, and even reprints of the old Santa Fe railroad posters, they can take home or send to a friend the image of the Grand Canyon they choose to remember, whether they actually saw it or not. This seems to be the danger of modern tourism, the compression of experience into a 3x5 image, a narrow view of the history and lives of the people who developed the places we deem tourist destinations.

As I have researched the history of the North Rim, it seems this phenomenon has happened. Like the paved roads that lead to Cape Royal or Imperial Point, or directly connect Kanab to Fredonia, but not Alton to Kanab, the history of tourist destinations across the West has been cemented into place. This consolidation might have been done for efficiency and speed of travel, like the branching roads that stretched across the Kaibab Plateau or through Houserock Valley. One road made it easier for out-of-towners to find their way in the maze of forest roads and sagebrush. But what we risk in that condensation is the loss of local knowledge, stories told by individuals like my grandmother and her parents, industries, or buildings that like Hall’s “Mr. House” contain the details that show what life in the area was really like. As Stephen Pyne wrote in *How the Canyon Became Grand*, “no single vantage point captures all the [Grand] Canyon, the
panorama is too vast; the details of its evolution are too demanding,” so too are the many stories that make up the North Rim’s human experience. But even if there are a multitude of experiences it doesn’t mean we shouldn’t record them, photograph them year after year to track the change and notice the beauty in the difference.

Although my family does not live on the edge of the Grand Canyon, in Kanab, or in the shadow of the Vermillion Cliffs, Highway 67 and Highway 89A, the roads that lead to these diverse and beautiful places, unite in front of our lodge. The histories of these roads tell my family’s experience in the Grand Canyon region. The joining of these histories over the past eighty-seven years has given us a unique perspective of the changes brought about by outside influences, modernization, tourism, and time.

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Our lodge, like any place where the dense collection of memories over time seems to strengthen the structures that contain them, is an archive of stories. The memories of my great-grandparents, Grandad, Grandmother, aunts and uncles, cousins, friends, tourists, locals, and past employees are written in the construction of the buildings, food, trails, employee activities, items in the gift shop, and land formations. Their names are literally written on doorframes, bunk beds, drawers, books, and maps. Worn wooden steps in the girl’s dorm, chocolate milkshake stains on the ceiling of the boy’s dorm bedroom, or the time-darkened carpet leading into Grandmother’s apartment are all visual representations of lives, choices, and relationships that converge in this one place each summer. I did not always understand these connections, but it seems that even as a child my brothers, cousins, and I knew we were building a future that expressed the construction of our past.

“It is your turn!” I squeaked from behind my older brother Burke. We all had our backs to the cinderblock wall just outside Jacob Lake’s main laundry room.

“But they will know I don’t really need the sheets for anything. They won’t ask you about why. They never do.” I knew he was right, the cleaning ladies never asked me. Around the corner I could hear their voices softly rising and falling, strange mixing syllables of Navajo and English.

“But I don’t want to get stuck in there. If Aunt Bonnie is folding sheets, she will make me help. I don’t want to. I want to come with you guys,” I whined.

“Well, then just start out and tell them that Mom needs the sheets. Did they stop you when you said that last time?” Burke questioned.
“OK, fine.” I stomped and turned the corner. The clean damp heat from the open door brushed my face.

“Hi, Alva!” I smiled a little too sweetly. “My mom needs some of the old sheets. Do you have any?” I am sure she saw my nervous sandals. I wasn’t good at lying then. My appendages were my give away, fumbling somehow as I waited for a stack of worn and stained sheets. My brothers, cousins, and I knew we would get in trouble if we took the new ones from the shed, but soon Alva’s stocky brown arms piled the sheets above my head. She and the other ladies giggled to each other.

“I just washed those,” I heard behind me. Aunt Bonnie, my adopted Navajo aunt, stood in the doorway, her five-foot frame less imposing than the doubting look on her face.

“Thanks, Alva. Thanks, Aunt Bonnie!” I mumbled quickly through layers of cotton.

“We are almost out of those old sheets, you know!” Aunt Bonnie yelled as I slid sideways toward the door.

“OK.” I replied, caught by the wrist and pulled outside. The sheets lifted from my arms, and we ran.

“Really? All bottom sheets?!” my cousin Johnny shouted. “They are never long enough and Grandad told us the Forest Service won’t let us put anymore nails in the trees.”

“How will they know?” Steve laughed, joined by the others. “We could probably build onto the old tree house our parents made when they were kids. I bet they would never even notice it.”
I scrambled to keep up, throwing a sheet around my shoulders like a cape, its elastic curves billowing behind. They were all older than me, three brothers, three cousins. My brother Ben was the closest in age. He was twelve, and five years older. I knew I was too young for some of the stuff they did, but they always let me come with them out into the forest. We raced past the sandy playground our parents had built for us in the early 80s, past the cracked basketball court, and past the huge rocks I pretended were horses.

This summer my brothers and cousins had already started working close to eight hours a day. We worked with our parents and employees, Burke in the kitchen doing dishes or prep work, Laura in the Bakery, Julie in the Gift Shop. Johnny and Steve, sometimes Ben, sometimes all the boys were out in the Gas Station, washing windows, pumping gas. If they were lucky Grandad pulled them from work at the lodge. They would spend the rest of the day fixing fences on our ranch near the Vermillion Cliffs fifteen miles away. But there were moments like this where we all found ourselves together, running away from the lodge, toward the worn track just beyond the crab apple at the corner of the cinderblock motel units now filling with new tourists. We reached the narrow road and crunched the huge pinecones under our feet.

“Why are we running?” Burke asked, all of us panting a little.

“I don’t know,” Julie laughed “I guess since there are no babysitters I feel like we’re going to get in trouble.” We slowed down to walk.

She was probably right. Since I was only seven, I am sure my parents would have preferred if the governess was there, but as was usual, we had ditched her. I think she was making lunch for us. The smart governesses knew where we were going. The others
wandered around distraught, after losing eight kids in one go. But we knew our way around those forest paths. We knew that most roads on the Kaibab would eventually lead us uphill, then to a junction, then to the highway. But we didn’t need a car to get to the Stick Fort.

I could see it in the distance, a grove of trees a few hundred yards away from the back line of cabins. I don’t actually know who founded it. It was probably made by my brothers and cousins before I was born, or at least before I could remember. But year after year the Stick Fort changed and expanded. We each had our own rooms formed by configurations of young pine trees and logs we dragged from other parts of the forest. We nailed sheets to the trunks as high as we could reach and made walls to bathrooms and a kitchen—a ghostly tent city in the middle of a forest. It was our home built like our family’s first lodge, with blankets for doors. We raked pine needles into large piles for beds and spread our stolen sheets on top, the sharp needles poking through threadbare centers.

I remember the Stick Fort started with a family room, a set of four huge ponderosas positioned in a perfect square next to the forest path. There was a large fire ring in the center of the trees. On some afternoons we would roast hotdogs with the governess or tell ghost stories or skinwalker legends after dark if our parents could get away from work. I was usually in bed by then or at least asleep in someone’s lap. I’d awake as we walked the path back home, feeling I had missed something, but not sure what it was.

Sometimes I walk out to the Stick Fort now. The Forest Service dismantled our kitchen table a few years ago, rolled the huge chunks of tree trunk we used for the legs
into a burn pile and covered it with branches for winter burning. My cousin Katie and I almost cried as we walked between the stubs of trees that formed our adjoining rooms. At that moment I felt a kind of loss I never expected, much like I expect my dad and aunts and uncles felt going back after years to the tree house they had helped build as children. The trees they had nailed boards to grew at varying speeds, warping and twisting the wood as years of heavy snow and heat pulled the nails from the thick bark.

For many people who come to Jacob Lake, traveling the highways through towns that change or diminish almost as fast as the scenery morphs through their car windows, it looks like our lodge probably hasn’t changed much in the 87 years we have been here. But like those roads and towns and people we have had to adjust our business with each fluctuation in gas prices and government regulation. In the 1930s and ’40s, my great-grandparents added cabins as they could afford them, a dining room, new gas station, a tennis court. I think as kids we sensed those adaptations, built our fort alongside the forest path like our first lodge, matched the Stick Fort to the ebb and flow of cousins growing older, moving away from Jacob Lake to attend college, build families and homes.

When Katie and I went back to the Stick Fort a year ago, it was barely recognizable between the trunks of slender saplings. But the family room was still there, our fire ring placed right in the center. Even as some family members move on to different lives and locations, even pass away, it seems that in this aging forest some things can’t be changed. Our stories are still there, gauzy memories stretched between the trees, uniting us together.

...
Tonight felt different than all the other times my extended family has gathered together in a small room. Usually we are cramped in Grandmother’s living room in the main lodge building, an 12x18 foot space full of people seated on couches, the floor, armrests, various chairs, even a Health Rider machine. Cousins and their children, aunts and uncles would spill into the hallways and into Grandmother’s sitting room waiting for birthday cake or pie to be passed hand-to-hand out of reach of sticky kid fingers or hungry pets. But tonight we congregated in the conference room of the newest addition to the buildings at Jacob Lake, a 24-room hotel complex. The room was arranged in haphazard rows of folding chairs, rocking chairs, and extra seats we used for the hotel rooms. My grandmother and her children—two girls and four boys—sat in a line at the front. Grandmother hunched in her walker, looking at the albums of herself in the 1920s stacked on the table in front of her, running her thumb along the edges as she stared. Then she looked up at me.

“Melinda, why don’t you start,” she called, leaning forward to whisper in my direction. She thought she whispered. She also thinks she isn’t hard of hearing. All eyes were on me.

“Hello, family,” I announced, standing, the restless tension in the room focused on my face. “I am sure most of you don’t know why I set this up tonight. You would probably be playing Rock Band if we hadn’t commandeered this room, but as you know I have been studying our family this past year. And more importantly, studying how our history fits into the narratives of the West—all of the experience we are a part of. As I have been researching, the question that kept coming up was how our life here on the Kaibab began.”
Thinking about that made me cry. I’d been crying a lot lately. Maybe it was the pressure of grad school seminars, teaching composition classes, researching, all the driving, and trying to actually write down all the connections I was seeing between books and roads and life experience. But it was also probably that the night before I had shared the digital archive of family photos most of my aunts, uncles and cousins had never seen, and I knew what it meant to them.

“I know, I’m crying, like always,” I said shrugging my shoulders and glancing knowingly toward my mom, who also had tears in her eyes. She brightened, laughed—so did everyone else.

“As I have been reading through Mama Nina’s and Grandpa Bowman’s letters to each other and looking through the stacks of photos here on the table, I realized I didn’t really know who they were. I could tell the kind of people they were, but I wanted to know their minds. I didn’t know why they chose to live here, spend their summers, falls, sometimes winters traveling between Salt Lake and Jacob Lake. Why did they begin this life and why are we still here?” It’s very possible that I wasn’t quite that eloquent. I lose focus when I am blubbery, but my family understood my meaning. They always do.

“So tonight, our parents and Grandmother are kind enough to answer questions about our great-grandparents and what they remember of their characters and experiences with them. I hope that through asking these kinds of questions we can come to know ourselves.” And as I looked around the room at the faces of my extended family I hope they wanted to know these things themselves.

I sat down, hoping that the heaviness in the room that sometimes comes from an unanticipated event would dissipate, that my cousins would ask questions that would
reveal scenes and stories I had never heard, to solidify the character profiles and personality quirks of my great-grandparents that I had been collecting for years. Someone laughed near the back. My younger cousin Bryan began putting increasing pressure on the back of his father’s chair, tipping him forward into a squat.

But then a series of questions came, and then stories and whiffs of memory as far back as some of them could reach inside. As my aunts and uncles talked, my grandmother thumbed through her pictures, pausing again to rub the side of a photo, lean in close to read faces, and smile—only looking up when asked a question directly or to clarify something her children might had misinterpreted.

“No! I’m telling you that is was not how the story went,” my dad said forcibly. “Grandpa was not there the first summer they started Jacob Lake.” A sudden hush spread through the now overheated room.

“Wait, Grandmother,” my cousin Johnny yelled from the back, “You were born in 1923, right?”

“Yes. June 22,” she answered, as if we didn’t all have it memorized.

“From everything I have heard, your parents started the lodge that same year, the summer you were a newborn. Is that right?” he said cautiously.

“Mama Nina was the one who ran it that summer. With her brother Ez,” my Uncle Chris chimed in. “They siphoned gasoline from fifty gallon barrels, sold sandwiches, told the tourists where to go when they reached the rim.”

My grandmother looked up from a stack of photographs. “I don’t think I was there that summer, I think I was in Kanab with some of my older relatives.”
“Wait,” my brother Ben said. “Grandpa Bowman wasn’t there that summer? Neither were you?” The room began to buzz. I had read this myself, in Grandpa Bowman’s history. He hadn’t been there most of the season. Ez had stayed with Mama Nina. But I was confused about why Mama Nina would leave her newborn in Kanab while she went to work hours away? Grandmother lived there that summer, didn’t she?

“Grandmother, wait, you would have only been months old,” my pregnant cousin, Julie, piped in, “and she left you with other people for months?”

My grandmother looked up again, confused it seemed, “What are you talking about?” Most of us laughed, but a strange tightness filled the spaces between people, something monumental, disconcerting, had just happened, and she didn’t seem to notice.

“Grandmother, were you with your mother the first summer they went to sell gasoline at the side of Jacob Lake?” my cousin Paul, an attorney, said, carefully picking his words.

“Yes. I was.” She said. Murmuring filled the room again.

“But you just said you were in Kanab, with older ladies.” My brother Ben said.

“Oh, I don’t know,” my grandmother said. “My father wrote that they started the summer of 1923. I was born that summer, but I don’t know where I was. I never asked.”

“So all those tiles we made years ago, at the seventy-fifth anniversary, could have said anything, 1924 or whenever, because we don’t really know when they started,” my cousin Johnny said. Some people laughed, he’d meant it as a joke, but faces turned toward each other, looking for recognition of the same untethered feeling. My aunt Mary Lynne sat cross-legged, tight, scowling at grandmother.
“They started in 1923,” my Uncle Chris stated, “that’s what I have always heard, that’s what Grandpa said. That’s when it started.” My dad nodded his head, his brothers and sisters bobbing together.

“He said they started it that summer, sold gas from the back of the truck for two years, camping like the rest of the tourists, in tents, and built a cabin at the top of the hill, just above the lake in the third year. It was basic, blankets for doors, and Mama Nina made food and sold pottery and other Native American art,” my dad pronounced.

I looked to my grandmother. Her neck was bent over the dark pages of the oldest photo album. Watching my grandmother made me nervous, aware of how delicate the line is between memory and myth, photographs and real experience. Sometimes I worry that without a clear, permanent record of our history, we will lose all the detail of our experience, that it will become a postcard version of itself, a series of memories agreed upon to make the oppressive heat of not knowing, of not being there to witness for ourselves, seem right.

The discussion ended soon after that. Someone told the story about how Grandad had saved the lodge in the 40s when the garage had caught fire and barrels of kerosene exploded through the roof, covering everything in a flammable mist. Cabins had ignited; the water tower would be next. But Grandad drove a halftrack bulldozer through the flaming cabin, leveled it in two turns. As my Uncle Chris and I looked at the soot stains on the garage’s exposed stone walls the next day, I thought it was the lodge Grandad had been protecting from the flames. But as I have recalled the different accounts again and called my grandmother’s cousin who had filled buckets of water to douse the flames the day of the fire, told me it was the water Grandad was saving, not the lodge or even the
vehicles inside the garage, as I had always thought. Grandad saved what he knew would sustain us. Without water, it appeared, we would have had nothing; our future in this forest would have evaporated into the air. It seems that everyone has their own version of the story to tell. It is the connections, the crossroads of truth and fiction, memory and experience that create the history we know. We might still have to haul water more than twenty miles from springs and tanks to keep our lodge running each day, but it is the stories that sustain us now, link us to the people we have lost and those physical things that remind us of the life we have lived, remind us of the people we are.

... Over the past two years I have formally researched my family’s history in helping establish the North Rim of the Grand Canyon as a tourist destination. During this extensive study, I have realized that our location, at the junction of the highways my ancestors helped build, roadways that brought new industries, cultures, or social and technological transformation, is the perfect metaphor for our life. A crossroads, whether defined as the physical meeting of two or more roads, or as a place of contact, unification, or connection between societies or even individual people, serves to highlight one of the key concepts of Western experience my family has exemplified. Like our business, each point along the roadway, trail, or lake-side settlement, whether in the 1800s or in the present time, functions as an intersection of cultural, economic, linguistic, and aesthetic exchange.

In many ways the image of a junction also lends itself to a more intimate definition. As I have learned to understand our business and my family’s unique blending of Western and native cultures, I most often find myself in conversation with my
grandmother, at the meeting of our comparative experience. My grandmother is the final founding member of our family’s eighty-seven-year-old lodge. In fact, she and the lodge are the same age. At times I imagine them as twins, joined by some innate and inexpressible connection. She has watched the Grand Canyon region transform, watched as dirt roads and trails covered in thick layers of oil and tar were paved with asphalt, were cut through mountains and whole cliff-sides, all in an effort to connect the small towns and the landscape that surrounds them to the outside world. Sometimes she tells me she gets lonely for people who comprehend that kind of change. I think for the past five years she has been teaching me to understand her.

I have come to recognize the connections my grandmother has taught me to see between her past and my future. During each discussion we would gather in her study across from each other, whether in her sitting room at Jacob Lake or in her house in Salt Lake City. As she spoke the framed family pictures on the wall behind her are colored by her stories from the past. Most of the conversations with my grandmother sprouted from daily events—the waitresses were having trouble learning the menu, the snowpack was too deep so the Grand Canyon won’t open for another week, we sold five Navajo rugs in one day and Shiprock Trading Company was bringing more for us to choose from. But these daily occurrences would most certainly lead into conversations about the past: how selling five rugs a day in the 70s was considered a slow day, or how most travelers in the 20s brought their own tents and camped along the roadside all the way to the Grand Canyon, or how my grandad used to ask the store employees to give him cone cups full of ice cream even though he had diabetes.
I would listen, prompt her with questions, laugh, sometimes even cry. She shared herself with me in a way I had only seen her do with her closest friends. Even now as my grandmother speaks of the people in her past, I see them as my friends and feel close to the great-grandparents I never knew. I am sure I would have sat with them for hours just as I do with their daughter. But after years of this intimate work, I decided I wanted to attend graduate school and learn how to express the connections I could trace between my family and our experience near the Grand Canyon to the greater themes of the US West.

I never thought that all those late night conversations in my grandmother’s study would lead to an oral history project or my graduate thesis, for that matter. As I read through books and websites, wrote papers, and formally interviewed my grandmother, I found myself confronting my understanding of my relationship with her and in turn my relationship with our family business. I came into this project rather naïve, imagining the conclusions I had drawn about my family’s experiences in the Kaibab Forest were the correct way of representing our history. I had thought my grandmother Effie Dean Rich a woman who speaks through images and connections from her unusual life experience, would have the answers to the growing list of questions I had formed in my mind. But as I began to dig, my assumptions and the facts didn’t always match up.

Over the years I had imagined my grandmother was like me when she was younger, a sponge soaking up all the family knowledge and history of people and places around the Grand Canyon. Although she has an incredible ability to remember things, as I interviewed her she did not have some of the answers I was seeking. Especially when it came to her parents as a young couple building our lodge. She didn’t want to speculate
about their motivations or put words in her mouth. She wanted the representation she gave of them and their reasons for beginning Jacob Lake Inn to be accurate. If she didn’t have a direct memory or could find the answer in one of the many family documents we have, she would say, “I don’t know.”

I am grateful for her insistence on honesty and accuracy, but I grew frustrated, and in sections of her interview, I found myself trying to tie large amounts of information together, feeding her questions that would come to a conclusion I had thought of.

Melinda: “What I wanted to do is just try to get an understanding of their motivations with the business, and what you thought about their mind set and moving out to Jacob Lake. I think that a lot of people wonder why they would have done it, was it a grand scheme? Why would they have done it? Or was it just a thing to try out?”

But this plan failed and she turned the question back on me.

Grandmother: “Does that make sense to you? Do you think there was any grand plan?”

This was not the answer I was expecting at all. And if there is a lesson to be learned from my first time interviewing, it is that most of my understanding about my family’s business had been idealized and shallow. I had grown up hoping, or at least thinking, that Jacob Lake had been established with strategic order, but even there I was wrong. I remember another evening my grandmother saying “I am positive my parents never expected Jacob Lake to be what it is today.” Their experiment had become our livelihood, but as my grandmother stated in her interview, “it was the way they were earning their living” but was not an enterprise they saw as being the sole means of income for my entire extended family. She added, “The thing that I see is that [Jacob Lake] has always given us a base…[It was] what sustained things over the period of time.” As she explained, they built cabins, extended the lobby and dining room, moved
family apartments and even added our u-shaped lunch counter much later than I thought. All of this effort was done because there were tourists who would come, drawn to the drama and experience of the Grand Canyon region. Over the years we have learned to understand the public’s motivations, adapt to their needs, and somehow do it with limited resources and capital. Again, this was not the response I was expecting, but it explained in a roundabout way many of the questions I had been seeking answers to.

Our business grew out of necessity, from the ingenuity and determination of my great-grandparents and the traditions they were raised in. My relatives built roads in the early 1900s, brought automobiles into the region, supported the gasoline industry, and pushed for the extension of electricity to remote areas. They moved highways, herded cattle, and made connections to the diverse cultures and people in their area. My great-grandparents built two lodges, made improvements, and added on sections or new cabins as they could afford it. The lodge went from being entirely run by family, to college students, friends, and townspeople hired to help service the tourists and travelers who would inevitably pass by our lodge in the forest. As time progressed we learned to adjust to the rush of change and expansion that each year had the potential to leave those unwilling to adapt to the tourist culture in the dust.

And as my grandmother concluded that first interview, she gave me a new perspective for the future of our lodge. She explained that Jacob Lake has always given each member of my family—whether it was in the 20s or today—a place where we receive the “opportunity to improve [our] skills and verify what’s possible, but only if [we] follow correct principles and do what [we] do because [we] think of the consequences.” I think in some ways my grandmother’s reference to consequences is the
balance to my great-grandparents’ experiment. That perception and insight is the luxury of time, seeing the effect decisions and adaptation have had on an entire region and on one family. She ended our conversation matter-of-factly as she so often does, stating, “That’s what I think. I just want my family to take advantage of what they have and make it count for something.” Here at the critical juncture of my academic career, I hope this conglomeration of facts and memories will do just that.
AFTERWORD

Beauty and peace have been with me, wherever I have gone. At night I have watched pale granite towers in the dim starlight, aspiring to the powdered sky, tremulous and dreamlike, fantastical in the melting darkness.

- Everett Ruess

...
Northern Arizona is sky gazing country, a place where most towns are small enough that even sitting in your driveway or on the roof of your car, the light pollution from houses and grocery stores doesn’t dim the midnight sky. I often miss it, wish that I could travel south for the weekend and watch as the clouds gather near mountains and spread across the sky like cotton balls stretched thin and torn as I travel down Highway 89. If I could I’d drive into the night and stop on the side of the road, possibly in a moonless Houserock Valley and gaze at the spray of stars in the pressing darkness. At times I just imagine it, try to describe the vivid colors reflecting it seems up from the huge hollow of the Grand Canyon and into the sky, a mirror of orange and purple and red. Sometimes at night, in my apartment in Logan, Utah, I lie on my bed and gaze at the swath of impossible stars on my ceiling, a present from some past tenant. I imagine I am lying just off the highway like I used to as a teenager, spread on a blanket or towel with my cousins or friends, gazing at the wide patch of sky and stars framed by an even darker forest.

Sometimes I think the history of the Grand Canyon region is just as vast, a branching, weaving dot-to-dot of people and experiences, stories told from one perspective to be countered by another, layers upon layers of memories, emotion and facts, like a cosmic palimpsest carved and recorded in the night sky. Sometimes this overwhelms me, especially when I lie on the crumbling asphalt at the edge of our parking lot at the junction of Highway 67 and Highway 89A. The web of roads heading north and south feels as expansive as the constellations in the sky, linked together by the stories that gave them shape and meaning. The weight of those associations in the heavens and on the earth makes me feel like I
will never make sense of it all, even on the small scale in my own family and our life in the West.

But that is why the stars on my ceiling seem perfect some nights when I can’t travel the 400 miles to Jacob Lake from Logan. They are a reminder, a glowing representation of my memories and thoughts heaved skyward over the years. And these keepsake constellations are contained, limited by the height of my roof and their staying power, since most of the stickers fade after less than a minute. But even though they dim, I still need them and wonder what they will come to represent when I look back at my apartment years from now and the 9x9 foot room that for two years has served as a makeshift archive of my family’s history and my excavation of it. I think that like my Arizona sky and the roads that lead me to it, these glow-in-the-dark stars will remind me of the part of myself that sat at the crossroads, the beginning of my desire to order and name the dimensions of my history as I see it.
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