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**David Thomas Sumner**

## **Testimony, Landscape and the West—A Conversation with Stephen Trimble**

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*Stephen Trimble is a writer, photographer, naturalist, and Westerner. Born in Denver, he spent his childhood roaming the western landscape with his family, guided by his field-geologist father. A love of the West*

*stayed with him into adulthood. After receiving a bachelor's degree from Colorado College, Trimble took work as a seasonal ranger/naturalist at several parks and monuments in the West, including Arches and Capitol Reef in Utah. He produced his first published works as a writer and photographer during these years, including books, essays, posters, cards, and a trail guide—most notably, Longs Peak: A Rocky Mountain Chronicle.*

*Trimble proudly claims the label "generalist," and his life experience, photography, writing and education support this claim. After his work as a ranger, Trimble received an M.S. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology*



*David Thomas Sumner (Ph.D., University of Oregon) teaches in the English Department at Weber State University. His essays have appeared in *Ecocomposition* (SUNY Press, 2001) and *In Our Own Voice* (Allyn & Bacon, 1999). He is also contributing editor for *The Shape of Reason* (Allyn & Bacon, 2000). Sumner is currently working on a rhetorical study of American nature writing and its connection to environmental ethics.*

from the University of Arizona; he edited and published *PLATEAU* for Museum of Northern Arizona Press; he then became a full-time, freelance writer and photographer in 1981. Since 1981, Trimble has authored, co-authored, edited, and photographed many books, including *The People: Indians of the American Southwest*; *Talking with the Clay: The Art of Pueblo Pottery*; *Words From the Land: Encounters With Natural History Writing*; *The Sagebrush Ocean: A Natural History of the Great Basin*; *The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places* (with Gary Paul Nabhan); and *Testimony: Writers of the West Speak on Behalf of Utah Wilderness* (with Terry Tempest Williams). Trimble is currently at work on three book projects: a volume of literary nonfiction about the tension between community and development in the West at the beginning of the 21st Century (supported by the 2002 Oswald Fellowship from the Utah Humanities Council); an essay collection; and a novel set in the canyon country of southern Utah during the uranium boom of the 1950s. The following interview grew out of the author's interest in *Testimony* and the connection between literature and the activism required to preserve specific places.

Trimble has also won many awards, including the Earle A. Chiles Award presented by the High Desert Museum, the Ansel Adams Award for photography, and an honorary doctorate from Colorado College. Trimble's writing and photography are about being at home in the western landscape. "With every project," writes Trimble, "I extend the boundaries of my home." His current specific home is in Salt Lake City with his wife Joanne Slotnik, and their children Dory and Jake.

Read other work by Stephen Trimble published in *Weber Studies*: [Vol. 11.3 \(essay\)](#), [Vol. 19.3 \(art\)](#).

How did *Testimony* come together?

The earliest model we had in mind was *This is Dinosaur*. David Brower at the Sierra Club started this tradition of writing "battle books" in the fifties when he called Wallace Stegner and asked him to edit a book of essays to fight the dam proposed in Dinosaur National Monument. That was the model for all of the Sierra Club books that followed, and, really, it is a pretty direct line from that book to *Testimony*. Stegner's "Wilderness Letter" is the obvious direct antecedent to what we did—the inspiration—but in terms of larger books, *This is Dinosaur* is the model for all of the big picture books—and it has recently been brought back into print.

You say this book is a direct descendent of *This is Dinosaur*, but how did you and Terry decide that "this is something we need to do—we want to do"?

It grew out of conversations that began in January of 1995—the year that horrible BLM bill was introduced. You know that Terry had lived here a long time, and I have known her for 20 years. We met long before I moved here, when she was working on her very first book. Jennifer Dewey, who is an old, old, friend of mine, illustrated that book, and I met

This interview is part of a series of conversations with contemporary western writers about the ethical and cultural implications of nature writing. Other conversations by David Summer include:

[Conversation with Barry Lopez](#)

[Conversation with David Quammen](#)

[Conversation with David James Duncan](#)

[Conversation with Terry Tempest Williams](#)

Terry in San Francisco when she was working with Jennifer. I kept in touch with her over the years, and our paths intersected and crisscrossed frequently.

I think the first discussion we had about the book happened when I drove up Emigration Canyon to interview Terry for the new edition of *Words from the Land*, my anthology of natural history writing. In the second edition I added five writers; one of them was Terry. So I had a reason to sit down and do a more formal interview with her and to go back to take a portrait of her another day—this was in the middle of the winter of that year. The timing was really coincidental: that project brought us together for extended conversations at the same time the wilderness debate was heating up.

So we were talking a lot about Utah wilderness, and we just said to each other, "What can we do?"

We asked ourselves, "As writers, what can we do that is different from just writing an elegant piece of testimony for the hearing? Is there anything we can do beyond that? Can we use our skills in some way?" We talked about the various models. We talked about *This is Dinosaur* and picture books. We talked about the "Wilderness Letter." We talked about readings.

Terry had been involved with a reading in the United States Capitol rotunda commemorating Wallace Stegner's death, and she and several other people read pieces. I believe it was sponsored by Bruce Babbitt or George Frampton in the Clinton administration. And so we started throwing around ideas. One friend had suggested a Grateful Dead benefit concert. I thought about a Paul Winter concert, because he is a musician I've worked with, and his music is connected to landscape. We considered a reading in the capitol, with an associated broadside, but Terry was pretty pessimistic that many people would come. There is so much going on in Washington.

And so we thought, "How can we do this and get more people to listen? How about a lunch for congressional spouses hosted by Robert Redford? Redford would be the draw, but they would have to listen to us." Even though that sounded like a bit of a joke, it seemed like it wasn't a bad idea—spouses go home and talk to their partners at night. We toyed around with that idea and continued to think about it as a way to launch the book, but the logistics were just too complicated.

*What made you finally move forward with the idea of the book?*

We finally decided that what we wanted to do was to speak into the ears of the members of Congress as directly as possible. We wanted a mainline between our hearts and their ears—their hearts, really. We knew that not every member of Congress was going to pay attention—many would just throw the book away. But we believed that if we gathered words that were eloquent enough, and packaged them nicely enough, here or there a staffer or a member would pay attention.

**We decided, probably in late spring, that our approach would be to put together a small book of pieces from our whole community of writers and place it onto the desk of every member. Then we wanted to get the timing right, when events really heated up to some sort of crisis, so Utah wilderness issues would be on people's minds.**

**We relied on our pipeline to SUWA (Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance) to find out when that would be. Toward the end of July we decided that this was the time. On about the first of August, we got together and wrote a letter and sent it out, inviting essays from a list of about, as I remember it, 25 writers with strong ties to Utah. Most didn't live in Utah, but they cared about Utah. Terry and I both had commitments most of the month, so we sent out the letter—and just left town.**

**We didn't do any calls; we didn't do any follow-up at all. And then we returned toward the end of the month, and we were getting these amazing responses. We followed up with a couple of the folks who had more prominent names that we really wanted to snag. But, for the most part, we just used what we got.**

*You did get some great contributors.*

**I think it had to do with our connections with friends, along with people's commitment to the issue. These people cared. They cared a lot about wildness. About *this* wild country. About doing the right thing. And there is such a strong sense of collegiality in the natural history writing community. The book is a true collaboration—from the beginning, with Terry and I, through the magic combined power of the essays.**

**Then, at that point, politics kicked in. We had Karen Shepherd as our political adviser for how Congress works and for contacts in Washington. Both Terry and I were good friends with Karen—and those two years when she served are the only time I expect to have a friend as my congressperson! Karen's former chief of staff donated his time to arrange our press conference. We used the SUWA media contact people—the people who do the press releases in Washington. Cindy Shogan, the savvy director of the Washington office of SUWA, gave us lists of interested members of Congress to lobby.**

**We had one funny and ironic encounter during our two days of lobbying Congress. Terry and I tried in person to give copies of the book to each member of the Utah delegation in person. Terry had church and family ties to Congressman Hansen, and so he felt compelled to invite us into his office for a few moments.**

**And, as an aside, amazingly enough, this turned out to be the very day that Hansen introduced the Snowbasin land exchange bill that would figure so prominently in my current book project.**

**A huge painting of Lake Powell hung over Hansen's desk. He clearly loved that painting. Jim Hansen adores Lake Powell. And Lake Powell makes me cry. I can't go on the lake. I can't photograph it. I still find the drowning of Glen Canyon absolutely gut-wrenching.**

So the congressman proudly showed off the painting. And I tried to be both polite and honest. I said that the artist had actually captured a little of the spirit of Glen Canyon, of what lay beneath the artificial lake, when he painted the buttes *above* the lake.

A call came in, and Hansen's secretary fed it through, unaware of his visitors. It was a Tooele County commissioner from back home, upset about those "envarmentalists" trying to block Hansen's wilderness bill. Hansen was squirming. He tried to deflect the caller, alert his secretary, and get off the line. Terry and I tried not to giggle—we were shown the door quickly afterwards.

In every office we visited, we presented ourselves as totally independent of any organization, and, as writers, we were. For funding, we were originally going to use money from The Wilderness Society, or maybe funnel donations through Don Snow and Northern Lights Institute, but we finally decided that if we were completely independent we could be more effective. So Karen Shepherd helped us again—to contact Ian and Annette Cumming, the prime liberal benefactors in Utah, who gave us the six thousand dollars or so we needed to actually print the book. Everybody involved in production cared so much—and donated time to the project. The designers, Trent Alvey and Carl Trujillo, worked for minimal cost.

It all happened so fast. By the third week in September, Terry and I were in Washington, book in hand, speaking to TV cameras on the lawn in front of the Capitol with Tom Watkins. Congressmen Maurice Hinchey and Bruce Vento officially accepted the book from us on behalf of Congress.

*And it worked.*

And it really did work. That was the gratifying thing. We had no idea whether it would make any difference at all. One of the pieces of advice we got from Karen was that it was important to circulate the book with a "Dear Colleague" letter from some member in both the House and the Senate. It was fairly easy to identify the House members because of the commitments that Maurice Hinchey and Bruce Vento had made to Utah wilderness over the years. But it took us a while to snag a senator. We actually distributed it in the House a couple of months before we distributed it in the Senate. We couldn't get a senator to agree to do the "Dear Colleague" letter until Russ Feingold came along. SUWA helped us with that. A few months later came that filibuster when Bill Bradley and Russ Feingold were waving the book around on the floor of the Senate and reading essays from it into the congressional record. That was a thrill. And with that, the bill died.

The exciting thing is that *Testimony* has generated spin-offs. It has served as a model for *Park City Witness*; and *Voices From a Sacred Place In Defense of Petroglyph National Monument*; and *Testimonies: Winning Essays from the Boundary Waters Essay Contest*; and *The Book of the Tongass*.

The Boundary Waters and Tongass books came from Milkweed Editions.

**Milkweed was another part of the serendipity of the book. On the plane to Washington for the press conference, Terry and I agreed on Milkweed as our pick for favorite publisher for a trade edition, and that very night Emilie Buchwald, the publisher at Milkweed, called Terry in the hotel about something else. We both spoke to her about *Testimony*, and to our delight, she understood exactly what we were up to and said, "yes."**

**Milkweed was going to use *Testimony* as a seed for environmental multimedia extravaganza stuff all over the country. The leadership of that fell apart, but it was a great idea. The book did become a spark for Milkweed's fine *Literature for a Land Ethic* and *The World As Home* series and influenced their *Credo* series, as well—where land-based writers write short books about their basic ethical stance in the world.**

**Another thing that would be good to do is to look at some of the film footage from the gathering at Sundance. Are you aware of this at all?**

*No.*

**Well, one of the things Milkweed did, with foundation support, was to gather together at Sundance about two thirds of the writers in the book for a group reading and a couple of days of roundtable discussions—it was really wonderful—with the idea that this would generate a PBS documentary.**

**Unfortunately, it never went beyond that weekend. But it was all filmed, and that footage is in Provo with the freelance guy who did the filming, David West. It is a completely underutilized resource. He recorded all the discussions between the participants, interviews with a variety of us one-on-one—plus the reading itself, which was very, very moving. Everyone was so high to be there together. We had Bill Kittredge, Tom Lyon, Ellen Meloy, Dick Shelton, Karen Shepherd, Don Snow, me, Ann Walka, Charles Wilkinson, Terry, and Ann Zwinger.**

*I was impressed with the contributors. You pulled together some of the most talented people who are writing currently.*

**Yes. Milkweed also had this plan that they were going to take the book into churches all over the country and have people generate their own local *Testimony*. As one of the things to get that started, they conducted an essay contest in Minnesota asking citizens to write about the Boundary Waters and then chose the four or five best pieces and published them as a little chapbook. Those pieces also were published in the big newspaper in Minneapolis, the *Star Tribune*.**

**At the time we got going with Milkweed, they had a full-time person who coordinated the Sundance event with me. She was great but then quit working for them, so there was no one to drive these broader ideas for publicity.**

*You mention that this book has had direct influence on other volumes—Headwaters, for example.*

**Yes. And I just heard a different slant on using it as a model. Bob Pyle, Robert Michael Pyle, do you know his writing? *Wintergreen* and *The Thunder Tree*?**

*Yes.*

**He is one of the writers I have added to *Words From the Land*. He lives in Gray's River, Washington, and he was the Nature Conservancy Refuge Director in Portland for many years. In addition to being a fine and prolific writer, Bob is a butterfly guy. He's a world-class lepidopterist. Lincoln Brower is one of his butterfly buddies, one of the authorities on the over-wintering Monarchs in Mexico. Lincoln Brower had the idea, without knowing about *Testimony*, of pulling together a book of essays celebrating the Monarchs in Mexico, and Bob got him hooked up with *Testimony*. I don't know how far along they are, but it is an interesting application of the idea to a single species—to an endangered phenomenon in the animal world.**

*Speaking of this idea of application, you quote Stegner in the introduction. Stegner makes a distinction between his conservation writing and what he says is his more artistic writing. One of the things you say in the introduction to *Testimony* is that these essays argue for greater acreage and stronger protection. How do you see politics and art connected or disconnected, and what is, if any, the role of art in politics?*

**I am too much of an idealist at heart to have politics too close to the center of my soul. In practice, politics is way too down and dirty and brutal for art to have much of a place. But art and literature and eloquent words have a power. They can reach people; they can move people; they can change people's hearts and change the way people think. And changing the way people think is what politics is all about. What you want to do is have people vote based on how they have changed.**

**There is a continuum that starts out here with experience and at some point leads to commitment and activism. I actually think that art drives people to move along that continuum. Politics defines the actual process of taking what you believe out into the practical world of nuts-and-bolts horsetrading that makes things happen. But the continuum itself, I wouldn't call politics. It's more inward. Politics is an outward expression of people's beliefs and passions.**

**I don't describe myself as an artist, but I work in creative fields, and a critical person like you might call the work I do the work of an artist. When I get involved with an issue that I care about and start going to the meetings where people are trying to wrangle through these decisions, I come home with headaches. At best, I am conflicted, and I suppose most writers and artists are conflicted. But what we can do about the things we care about and about the direction we would like to see the world go is just to do our jobs—just to do our jobs as well as we possibly can and hope that we move a sufficient number of people to make a difference.**

**And you never really know. With *Testimony* we had this rather concrete example of having moved a couple of senators, but typically you don't know—unless you are someone who has**



developed reading from work as something of a performance art, like Terry. People flock to her readings, and they are moved, and she knows that. Most of us writers are much less conscious of ourselves as "personalities." People will come and tell us they like our books, and the books sell X number of copies, but for the most part, you don't know a whole lot about what is happening to what you send out into the world. I think that is especially true of nature writers, who, I think, typically, tend to be a little more shy.

*Back to this term "nature writing." You mention in the introduction to Words From the Land that most writers are uncomfortable with the term "nature writer" or "naturalist." They insist they are writers—not nature writers. Do you consider "nature writing" a useful term? Obviously, you used it in your book.*

ant to consider everything. I wanted to include landscape-based essays that people had already made a part of I did. It works, but it is obviously full of holes. I was using it in a pretty limited sense to describe these essays that have a lot of landscape in them. There are tons of nature writing in all kinds of writing, in poetry and fiction, but I limited myself in a practical way. I didn't wthe core of their work, rather than something that they would maybe do once or twice, even if they did it beautifully. So I had a particular type of writer in mind for that anthology, and you can call it "nature writing" or "landscape-based essays" or "writing about the land"—there are lots of different ways you can describe it. "Nature writing" is the most commonly used term, and as such it communicates the most directly.

I think it is easy to draw a line between nature writing and science writing. The motive changes when you move toward science writing, where you really want to communicate the science more than anything else. Nature writing is all about relationship—the relationship between the writer and the natural world, and, therefore, the reader and the writer and the natural world.

*How about writers who push the edge, like John McPhee? He seems to be right on the edge of science with Basin and Range, for example.*

McPhee is very science-based, and there is not much of his personal life in there. He is famous for keeping himself out. But he doesn't start out with the information at the beginning—he isn't a scientist himself. The primary driving force for him is the words. Stories drive McPhee. And he is willing to look for stories just about anywhere. He found a story that fascinated him in geology, but he did all of these very creative things, as in *Rising From the Plains*, where he balances the stories of the geology of Wyoming with a pioneer journal. He does things that a typical science journalist would never think of doing because he is primarily a literary guy. He is much less concerned with his own ego being involved in this, or his own personal journey, because, I think, he is a kind of hold-back New Englander at heart. He is very consistent about that. I mean, he just won a Pulitzer Prize, but he keeps himself out of the limelight almost completely.

In the end, I think I'd rather read writers who put a bit more of themselves in their work. As much as I admire McPhee's writing, after a while that reserve wears on me as a reader.

**But in my role as a commentator on nature writing, I put him right at the center of what I would call landscape-based essays.**

*In your own work, do you make the distinction between your artful writing and the writing you would do for Testimony, or the writing you do that might be more land based to promote the saving of a place?*

**Again, it's a continuum. For instance, in this piece for *Wilderness* magazine that I mentioned to you, it's really about these people I interview. There is not a lot of room in a short issue-based article for my own voice. There is a lot of craft in putting it together, and what I decide to include reflects my own positions and concerns. But because much of the piece is quotation from these other folks, it's a combination of editorial work—which I respect and value highly—I have worked as an editor a lot—and the craft in putting it together so it sort of sings. Transitions and introductions and the conclusion are really the only sections that are written in my voice. I have done a lot of that kind of writing.**

*Would your work with Indian people fall into this category?*

**Yes, very much so. My work falls into two halves. One is the nature stuff, and the other is my work with Indian people in the Southwest. The latter is very much interview based—lots and lots of quotation. I'm not speaking continuously in your own voice the way that you can in an essay or in fiction.**

**In 1993, I started working on a novel, and I spent about three years on it. I started from scratch. I had not written fiction since I was an undergraduate—not any fiction at all. But I have always thought of novels as the highest form of writing—the thing I most aspire to do well. And I just hit a point where I felt that I was old enough to give it a try—and stable enough in my financial situation that I could take that risk.**

**After working on it for those years, I learned a ton. I can apply everything I learned to everything I write, but I kind of ground to a halt. I had about 150 pages. I didn't have a finished piece of work—but I'll get back to it. These people—my characters—are still very much alive for me. The one published piece is a short story that was in the last issue of *ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment)*. That story actually won a little award in the Frank Waters Southwest writing competition—it took third place a couple of years ago.**

**What drives me is not a huge kind of passionate outpouring of self, the way a poet might be driven or the way many fiction writers are driven. I am just not that inward or complicated. I am probably an educator as much as anything. Many of my books have as their goal sharing the excitement about something that I've learned with the reader. You know, I started doing this as a park ranger—that's my genesis. I served my apprenticeship as a park naturalist writing general interpretive booklets for park visitors.**

*Where were you a park ranger?*

Capitol Reef and Arches here in Utah, Great Sand Dunes over in Colorado, Olympic in Washington. And then I wrote little books for parks all over the West in my twenties and thirties.

I always think of my work in layers, adding new ways of understanding to the old ones. I began with these straight natural history books, then added the Indian perspective. Then I got married and had kids and became intrigued with seeing the world through their eyes—and this led to *The Geography of Childhood*. This took me even farther out into the world, to politics and *Testimony*, and then to the new book about Snowbasin and about what it means to own land.

I still have a real strong streak of, "Isn't this cool, I want you to know about this." That's very much an underlying part of my work with Indians and the natural history writing, and, certainly, *The Sagebrush Ocean*. That means there is a lot of informational content to the books. *Sagebrush Ocean* was an assignment, and a more technical book than I would write if I were to choose to write a book about the Great Basin myself. It is part of a series of natural history books published by the University of Nevada Press. I felt an obligation to be very thorough with the information, in addition to making it as much fun to read as I could.

It was a really freeing thing to write fiction. I don't think that by nature I am a great fiction writer. I have to learn how to be a great fiction writer, and I am not there yet, but it is something that I want to do.

*What are you working on at the moment?*

The book I'm working on now tries to take what I've done to a new level of literary nonfiction. That's this book about Mt. Ogden, Snowbasin, Earl Holding, and the controversial land trade with the Forest Service. I went up to Snowbasin on assignment to take pictures for a travel story about the funky old ski area before it's completely developed by Earl Holding for the downhill races in the Salt Lake City Olympics. And I just thought, "My God, this is a great story." I got very intrigued with it.

My initial take on the book was to ask the question, "What does it take to get a racer down the mountain in 2002?" and just work backward from the moment that the first racer goes out of the gate to wherever that led me. To have half of the world's population watching this moment, when there is this very high-tech race course there, I thought would be really intriguing. I put together a proposal, which we couldn't sell in New York. I was shooting for a bigger publisher than I have had in the past, because this project seemed like a natural for that. And much to my agent's surprise, as well as my surprise, all the publishers said it's too topical, too transitory, too newsy; it's a topic that doesn't generate a national audience for a book, let alone an international audience.

So I've reoriented myself on the book, and now what I'm doing is taking a look at Mt. Ogden as a western mountain and asking the question, "What is a mountain for?" I'm looking at all of the people who care passionately about the place, from the guys who

homesteaded there after World War I who are still around, right up through the ski racers and the course designer and Earl Holding, who owns the mountain and is the big bad western entrepreneur guy, and all the politics of the enviros and the conservation community and the grassroots people who are beside themselves about what Earl Holding has managed to do.

I've got Ogden Valley gradually being condominiumized and the little town of Ogden on the other side of the mountain struggling along as a small western city trying to make some economic progress to stay alive. So it is a microcosm of land management issues in the twenty-first century West.

I have also put way more of myself into this book than I ever have before. My wife and I have bought some land in southern Utah, where we split the piece to make our purchase financially feasible. And so now I'm a landowner, too—a developer, like Earl, on a miniscule scale. And I use our story in the book, as well. It's becoming a meditation on private and public land, on the tension between community and development in the West—and it's a much better book than it was in that initial proposal.

In some ways, Earl Holding and I go through the book as opposite answers to the question of what a mountain is for. I'm trying my damndest to write like a master, to write the hell out of it, to not lapse into descriptive documentary narrative.

*Often nature writers are seen as writers of place. Testimony is an attempt to defend a specific place. We live in a culture where we are quite mobile, and specific places seem to lose their significance in a lot of ways. How does place play a role in your writing? Has Utah become more of a place for you and your work?*

Place is hugely important to my writing. I have found that I am not good at writing about places that I don't have an emotional connection with or reaction to. Just as an example, when I was working on the Park Service projects, years ago, I got an assignment to write the brochure for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area outside of L.A. I blithely went there for a few days, figuring, "Oh yeah, it will fit into the other things I know about, and I can write about this place," but I didn't really care about the place. It was an intensely urban mountain range, totally foreign to me, and I did a terrible job. I just didn't have the words to write with any sort of excitement.

In terms of Utah, the Canyon Country has been my spiritual homeland since I was a kid. I started visiting the canyons on trips with my parents. I have enormous affection for many places—I have spent lots of time in the Rocky Mountains and the Sonoran Desert and in the Great Basin. But there is no place I love as much as the Canyon Country. I really can't write about a place when I don't have the connection.

Being place-based is different than being community-based. Many of the people who write about place with a lot of passion don't live in that place. They are pilgrims and return to these places they cherish. It's an enormously satisfying thing to go back to a place you care so much about as a pilgrim with the express purpose of words—of understanding the place

in words which you put in your journal until you can link them into a prayer or a celebration or... I still don't have the word that I'm after... an *homage*, an homage to the place you love. It's such a treat.

You go back to the same place over and over again, and it's like Abbey and his turkey vultures and the Canyon Country. I used to get sort of irritated that he would always come back to the same images in his writing. I felt like he was going back to exactly the same sentences and paragraphs, but he also would write himself out of those into new places as well, and that is what we are all trying to do.

Gary Nabhan and the Sonoran Desert, Barry Lopez and the Arctic. I do the same thing with the Great Basin. Not too many other people are writing about the Great Basin.

*They really aren't.*

In terms of community and mobility, there are two aspects to that. Joanne, my wife, had lived here in Salt Lake for almost twenty years when I got here, and so she had developed a wonderful community of people. I've always moved around a lot and gotten itchy feet after about five years in a place. My close community has spread all over the country—people whose friendship I've made along the way. I feel very much enmeshed in the community here now, because this is really the first time I've lived someplace for a long time, and I have the family and kids and all of those kinds of connections. That feels great. Although Salt Lake City is way too big and congested, it is still the best place to live to have that community and still be as close as possible to the canyons. There are many places that seem like attractive places to live, but they just seem too far away from slickrock.

There is another community of colleagues who I very much feel a part of—the other folks in *Words From the Land*—the other folks who write and take pictures and are involved in this world of publishing and naturalist activities of one sort or another. It is a far-flung community, but very much a community.

*How do you see the current interest in writing about the West? Is it a short-lived fad, or perhaps part of a more sustained set of issues deserving our attention?*

It's an interesting time to be talking about these things because the West is right on this cusp of change—we are right in the middle of it. It's going to go from being what we have always thought of as "The West" to being much more continuous with the rest of the country, much less different. As it fills in, two things happen. It becomes more like Dayton, Ohio, but the people who move to the empty spaces in the West can be educated. They are drawn here for a variety of reasons, and I think it's our obligation as people who are Westerners now to do everything we can to bring them along to the wisdom of the West—to reading Stegner as a fundamental prerequisite to owning a ranchette.

Those types of things engage me. And this book about Mt. Ogden is part of that. I hope the book can be an inquiry into all of the different ways of thinking about the West, from the

**ultimate user and developer to the people who are the craziest enviros, and everybody along the way.**

**I'm involved in a potential PBS documentary about trying to sort out the New West and the Bedrock West and the Old West—with a lot of playful making fun of the New West. How can we get more people to read about what the West is truly about and begin to become more sophisticated? I'm absolutely convinced that if they do, they will become better citizens of the West—more inclined to save open space and think about preserving rural culture and not just run rough-shod over the place.**

**I am thrilled with the number of books that *Testimony* seems to have engendered. That's one of the most satisfying aspects of the book. It's not just what it did for our wildlands here in Utah, but that the idea has caught on. In fact, a lot of people have suggested that *Testimony* influenced the setting aside of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. It's pretty hard to quantify, but I do think it had some small effect, at least keeping people aware of the preciousness of the place—sneaking a little inspiration and connection and knowledge into the minds of the people with power.**