

The Gift in the Rocks
by Mark Algazy

On a recent hike in the El Paso Mountains, I looked back down from my vantage point into the remnants of a long abandoned mining camp and thought to myself how solitary my old pickup truck looked there. However, as soon as I was done muttering aloud the words "There's nobody here but me" a smaller voice inside me continued "...and the energy of those who moved the rocks before you." Smiling, I returned to my truck, picked up a pen and paper and thought 'Alright then, tell me your story.' And so it is written.

First there were the listeners. They were not born here, but followed the hum of the mountain to this place. Those who have felt the vibration that hovers near the subsonic need no further explanation. For them, it is enough to say that all who wander are not lost. They who listened moved rocks in search of food, temporary shelter, and in acknowledgement of their humbled connection to this place.

Then came the dreamers. Drawn initially by worldly ends, their recorded failures were both predicted and preserved by a calculating world that knows nothing of the desert's secret treasures. Each passing year in the life of a prospector brought a reassessment of a life honed, not by magazine ads, but by the flow of the desert seasons. Without the panoply of distractions that portend a lifetime of unanswered questions, they picked up nuggets of circumspection at rates that would mystify our so called academics. The rocks they moved reflect the dreams they lost...and the dreams they found.

Then came the diggers, and the builders of roads. They heard nothing but the hum of the machines that they drove, and that drove them. They followed fault lines and the faulty lines of promoters. They kept their distance from the rocks, using claws and loaders, crushers and sorters, as if time itself were being mined. Unlike the listeners, when their unenlightened quest ended, whether by choice or chance, time ironically left them with a hum that lingered long after their machines fell silent. From them, the Earth took more than it gave.

And finally came the curious. To them, the listeners, the dreamers and the diggers were all legends. Children of the cities, they knew only in the simplest terms that others before them lived for a time in the 'wilder' places beyond the night lights.

Now, as then, they come by and large in the machines of the day, down the roads the builders had built. When they pause for a brief look around, they carry the hum of their utility vehicles into the larger mining camps and, with the hum, begin to imagine the steel and men that were forged, tempered and ultimately weathered there. For those who stop for an hour, the hum begins to subside, and they begin to discern the smaller remnants of the dreamers that dot the nearby hillsides. The paths that lead beyond the province of the machine still bear the tin can testimonials of their hunger. And if you look [and listen] long enough, you will notice that every claim has at least one rock large enough for a tired dreamer to sit and reflect on.

If you count yourselves among the curious, and should somehow reach this place in your travels, and make the fateful choice to walk further yet, know that you will not walk alone: you are wandering into a world where the rocks still talk, your feet still listen, and a part of you still belongs.

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