



Peggy Anderson

WOMEN PROTECTING
wilderness

As a part of the Women Protecting Wilderness Project, SUWA has been collecting stories from women about their experiences with wilderness. If you have a story you would like to share, please send it, with your photo to deeda@suwa.org. Below is Peggy Anderson's story as told to SUWA intern Anna Paul, with editorial assistance by Nelle Ward.

I go by Peggy Anderson as an artist, but my married name is Gibson, and I'm a Utah landscape artist. The Springville Museum lists me as one of the 100 Utah Artists over the age of 40 who have made a big contribution to this state in art in the last however many years. I love to paint the canyons and streams, but recently I've become very attracted to the desert areas. In fact, right now they're publishing a book from the museum on Utah artists who paint red rock, and they might include one of my paintings in it. It was done in Hanksville down by Highway 136 on our way to the arches, by Bluff and Mexican Hat at Four Corners. It's a little 17-mile dirt road across the reservation. It's a very interesting ride with the most gorgeous red rock – huge monoliths – bigger than you've ever seen, that people seldom go to. I spent about two-and-a-half hours going the 17 miles and took about 500 photographs as the sun had started set. It was really fun.

I've been painting since I was 10. I taught art in high school for 25 or 26 years, then I retired. I've always been active as a Utah painter, and I paint those things that I am familiar with. I paint where I live and what I know.

In the past I've been known as a Utah artist who paints red rock, but I don't know that that's really indicative of what I am most interested in. I've always been a lover of nature and trees. I love trees; I've painted trees a lot. However, I would say a favorite theme of mine is the Utah canyons. That's where I really like to go; I sit by the water and paint.

Once I was painting in Nephi behind the grocery store out on a dirt road, and occasionally bulls would pass, and you'd have to hurry to get over the fence. I was painting an east mountain and the fields and trees, and there were some teeny, teeny horses – they were probably about a fourth of an inch tall in the painting. Once I was looking at my painting, when this dog suddenly came up and wet on my painting. It was a watercolor. I grabbed my water bucket and screamed, and he ran. I threw the water on the painting (which doesn't hurt the paint) to wash it off. I sold that at Sullivan Gallery to tourists. I've always wanted to find them and tell them the story, but I don't know who bought it.

I'm the mother of four beautiful daughters, and of course, many beautiful grandchildren. We've had a neat little house here in West Jordan for 22 years. I was raised in Utah, but I've been to New Mexico, Arizona, Idaho and many other beautiful places. New Mexico has particularly gorgeous country that

Mexico, Arizona, Idaho and many other beautiful places. New Mexico has particularly gorgeous country that an artist gets attracted to. We had wonderful times on the reservations in those areas and we're very aware of their environmental conditions of the reservations. We were always concerned about how it was treated. In my family, we've always been careful about leaving the land in better condition than when we found it; we've always respected where we are.

We once had a little trailer, and I used to take the kids down to Salt Creek Canyon every summer, but unfortunately it just burned down. I was a single mom, and I couldn't afford to go anywhere else, so I'd take my little six-sleeper trailer and hook it up to my car, then haul it up to the little KOA up there in Salt Creek Canyon by Nephi – between there and Manti. That's where they recently had those terrible fires this summer, and the KOA burned to the ground. Emily, my youngest daughter, and Megan have still been going back there with their children. It was once such a beautiful place, so immaculate and clean. It had water running through it, oaks and river birch; I would sit there and paint it. In fact, the Salt Lake County has a painting I did there of a river birch, which they bought for their collection, and I did that sitting outside my little trailer next to the stream. That's why I would go, just to get away and be out there.

We used to tromp along the dirt roads. The kids would line up, following their dad, and laugh as they walked around in the mud. We didn't have any paved roads, and so you'd have tractors come and pull you out. My little Emily one day was crossing over to go to her friends, and she got stuck up to her ankles in the mud. She had these little red boots on. She was screaming, so I went and pulled her out, while the boots stayed there.

One time I took my grandchild Taylor up to Big Cottonwood Canyon. I used to go up there by myself where I'd sit with my legs hanging over the cliff. I'd go up by Cottonwood Waterfall, where the water cascades down. That's where Taylor once accompanied me. We brought lunch, and he climbed on the rocks in the stream. The area around the stream up at Big Cottonwood is actually one of my favorite wild places. When I feel the need to go out and paint, that's where I go. So it was a really special moment to have little Taylor with me there.

When my family and I were living out in Window Rock, I found certain quotes that remind me of how I want to live. A favorite quote of mine is "People, kindly people, gentle, shy, with the sunlight in them, and the depths of the sky, the quiet of the desert, the strength of the rock, wise in the ways of living, that brings richness to the heart." As well as, "First fruits of the harvest arrayed in the center of a room, the family gathered around the ritual of Thanksgiving, the man and son taking the store of pinion nuts gathered by a packrat for winter eating, replacing the take with an equal amount of grain."

We lived at the reservation because my first husband worked as an attorney for the Navajo tribe. After that we moved to Zuni, and he worked for Governor Louis with the Zuni tribe. We developed such a love of the people and the country there. I mean, the country is just – it's gripping. Once you've been there, you can never get it out of your soul.

I remember crying when we went to Window Rock because it felt so desolate. Once we went on a family picnic and the kids were eating with their dad when I went out to do some oil painting. I was sitting under a huge oak tree, which was unusual because it was in a pinion forest. There was a shepherd in the valley, and I could hear them as they passed through the gulley. It was a very romantic, beautiful day, and I was just sitting, painting this big tree. That's when I started to cry. When we left, I cried again; I didn't want to ever leave it. It was so beautiful. It really isn't desolate. It's dif-

ferent.

I also had an emotional experience when I once went up to Zion National Park, to paint for a week. It was very frustrating because it's so vertical, and you can't get back far enough. I'm kind of an aerial painter from distances, and I just couldn't do it. I sat there frustrated, as King Snakes and lizards passed by. I had my water and umbrella, and I sat there for four or five hours. I remember how the sun set and formed shadows across the way after I'd been struggling with this ugly picture for hours. I looked up and saw the shadows on this little mesa, and I just grabbed a piece of paper and painted the shapes and the shadows, and in just 15 minutes I had painted a picture. I remember putting it against a rock and sitting back on my haunches in the dirt there, and just looking at it. I plopped down on my bum and started to bawl because it just happened, and it worked, and it was. I remember at that point in time saying, "The problem you've been having is that you've been trying to conquer Zion National Park, and it just let you win. It gave you the opportunity to be here, and it accepted you for a minute. You don't conquer this place. You're a guest here." I've had a lot of those kinds of spiritual experiences that are really tender. That was an especially lovely experience for me to recognize not only my connection to nature, but also my smallness.

I try to make a difference through my artwork. I just finished with the Arts for the Parks competition. I had a painting of the West Rim Trail entrance. They had 100 winners, and I was one of them; it was a really exciting moment. The paintings of the parks traveled to four different places across the country. They ended up at the Smithsonian, and they were hung there. I think I've contributed to helping others appreciate nature in that way, and just through my own love of it. I think as we do our own things, we also all help each other.

I feel that we can never ignore the beauty of Earth, and we have to take care of it. There are certain ways to do it and I think Earth was a gift for us to use. I think the Earth was made for man, and that we've been charged with caring for it. We are to take care of and use the earth for our own good, but with kindness, gentleness and temperance. We need to restore what we take. If we take something, we put it back. For example, when the Indians take pine nuts, they put grain back for the little critters that are saving for winter.

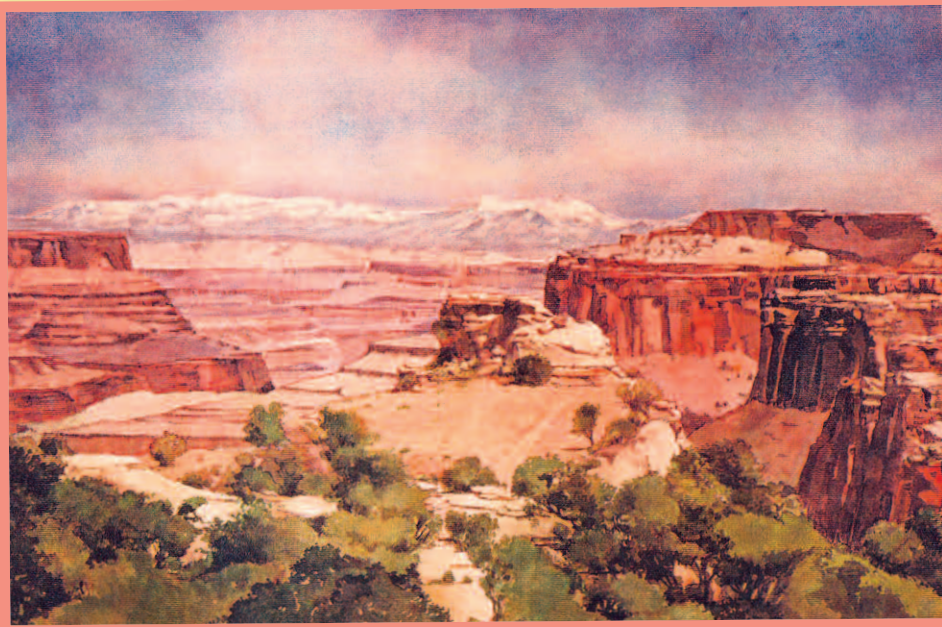
I feel that valuing wilderness is in your spirit and your soul; we have to have it. It's like music and art, in that we have to have them. People who don't understand that art is an integral part of education don't understand that they're depriving people of feeding our spirit and soul. I think it's imperative. Nature is the basis of everything; it's where we live. It's our Earth.

I personally believe that the Earth – and this is a theory called the Gaia theory – the Earth is one living organism. This theory even goes so far as to talk about mushrooms, and how they grow under the earth like veins; they are the arteries and veins of the soul of the Earth. It's definitely an interesting thought. I heard it from University of Utah radio, and what they said was absolutely fascinating to me; I just couldn't believe it. It talked about how the Earth heals itself and goes through natural cycles.

I don't believe that global warming is something we're causing; I think we contribute, but I don't think there's a lot we can do about it. It's a cycle and it's going to happen. We need to do our best to take care of it. I think that we can keep the air cleaner and do what we can, but you're not going to stop global warming because the Earth is going through this cycle, and it's part of its body. That's part of what it's doing right now, and I don't think it has a lot to do with what man's doing.

If I were to come back to Utah in 100 years, I would want there to be more trees. I want there to be less houses and billboards. Some people are getting better about taking care of the earth, while some are getting worse. I think we're getting better about taking care of the tree planting and restoring. I think we need to be reasonable, but we need to use this Earth too.

Women, teach your children to love the wilderness. Teach your children to take care of it. Not everybody's a mother, but we all have motherly tendencies inside us. It's the children that we have to take care of, because they are the future. A lot of children don't respect us or anything around them, and we need to go back to having less so we appreciate what we do have more. Our children need to realize they have a responsibility to take care of things and to contribute, not just take. We're all worried about us. We need to stop worrying about "me" and think about each other; that's our biggest problem.



Southern Utah Landscape
by Peggy Anderson