

eight of
the best

**Buffalo Lights
+ Taos Soul**

Zoo Pilot Publishing
Sampler (8 Chapters)



JOHN HAMILTON FARR

**BUFFALO
LIGHTS**
and
TAOS SOUL

Eight of the Best

by

JOHN HAMILTON FARR

Zoo Pilot  Publishing

TAOS, NEW MEXICO, U.S.A.

Copyright © 2011 John Hamilton Farr

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or retransmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Zoo Pilot  Publishing

TAOS, NEW MEXICO, U.S.A.

Table of Contents

Introduction

New Mexico Slow

Devil Dogs of San Cristobal

Self-Propelled Geranium

The Spirit of a Place (and How to Find It)

Compulsion

Windshield

Natural Born Killer

Message for the Fourth

About the Author

Introduction

THIS EBOOK features eight of the best stories from *BUFFALO LIGHTS: Revised Edition*, and *TAOS SOUL: Love Stories, Heroes, and Wild Adventure*, available from the Amazon Kindle bookstore for \$2.99 each. (Except for the one below, the photos included here are from the latter.)



Most of you reading this have probably never been to northern New Mexico. Life in Taos sometimes comes very close to living on the frontier, however, or even in another world. (If we're both lucky, these books will take you there.) Please visit my [blog](#) for synopses, order options, and much more writing about New Mexico, the universe, and my own path through it. Living here makes you think about these things, it really does.

Most free ebook samples only give you the first few chapters, but what's included here are eight of the best. Naturally, it's my hope that these selections will arouse your curiosity in the full versions. Even if they don't, once you've read them, you won't be quite the same.

I know because I've lived them, and I'm not.

- John Hamilton Farr
Taos, New Mexico
January, 2011



New Mexico Slow

From *BUFFALO LIGHTS*, \$2.99
(42 stories & photos)

IT WAS EERILY QUIET, my first day at the dump.

A gust of wind chased a small piece of paper across the dusty ground as I climbed out of the truck. Hearing the creak of a door, I turned to see an older man emerging from a small shack twenty yards away.

“Howdy,” I said nervously, suddenly worried that my black cowboy hat and Maryland license plates were dangerously out of place.

“Hi fella, how you doin’?” said the smiling silver-haired man as he approached, carrying a clipboard. A pencil stub dangled from the clip, attached with a piece of string. Grasping the stub, his hand hovered over the printed form flapping in the breeze as he eyed the black-and-white plate on the rear bumper and inquired, “Where you from?”

“San Cristobal,” I replied. “I’ve got three bags. Where do I put ‘em?”

Gesturing with his pencil stub, he indicated the nearest dumpster. Without further ado, I opened the tailgate, grabbed all three bags at once, and heaved them over the side. “Thanks,” I yelled back in his direction as I slammed the gate shut and climbed back into the cab. He stood off to one side, holding his pencil stub slightly aloft, expectantly, like an orchestra conductor waiting to begin. I started the engine and buckled my shoulder belt, grateful to have successfully disposed of my load.

“OK, you have a good day!” he called out as I circled the dumpster and headed back out the way I had come. We both waved as I drove out of sight, but when I reached the highway I felt uneasy, like something was not quite right. I realized then that for all his good manners, I had disappointed the man somehow.

The next time I went to the dump, he was there again. But this time after I had disposed of the trash, I closed the back of the truck and lingered, taking in the view.

Relaxing a bit more, I adjusted my sunglasses and forgot about time. We stood comfortably across from each other in the bright

sunlight. He made a mark or two on his clipboard with the pencil stub and smiled, squinting slightly as he sized me up.

“I have a string,” he said.

“A string?” I echoed, suddenly clueless.

“For when it gets cold,” he said. “I have a string.”

I had entered another dimension. There was nothing to do but relax even further and let the encounter unfold. He watched me wait three or four beats, cock my head slightly, and lift my chin to meet his gaze. A gust of wind rattled the papers on his clipboard. An engaged, expectant look spread across his face as he smiled again and said, “I tie it to the little lever on the thermostat above my bed. When it gets cold at night, I give it a little pull so it gets warm.”

“Oho!” I exclaimed, “So you don’t have to get out of bed!”

“Yes,” he replied, grinning.

“But what do you do if it gets too hot?” I asked.

“I have a little stick,” he answered. “I just reach up with my stick and push the lever back. Then it gets cool again, so I can sleep.”

“Ah, a stick! A string and a little stick,” I acknowledged. We both laughed. “Very good, a string and a stick!” I repeated.

“Yes,” he said, satisfied, still grinning at me.

Sharing his contentment, I stood there, waiting for nothing, until I heard myself say, “Well, I guess I’d better be going.”

“All right,” he nodded. “You have a good day, fella!” and with that he turned and walked slowly back toward the little shack. I climbed into the truck and watched him in the side mirror as I fastened the shoulder belt and started the engine. By the time I turned the truck around, he had reached the door and stood gazing in my direction. We waved again as I headed for the highway, feeling much better this time.

The third time I went to the dump, a different, even older man was there. After I’d told him who I was and where I was from, I tossed my bags in the proper place and turned to receive my blessing for the week. He waited a moment or two, and then said in heavily accented English, “I hope we get some snow. We sure could use some now, you know?”

Thankfully dropping out of gringo gear, I offered: “They say we

might get some tonight.”

“Well, I don’t know,” he said with concern, looking up at the sky. “Them clouds is pretty high.”

And so they were. Glory hallelujah, so they were!

Devil Dogs of San Cristobal

From *BUFFALO LIGHTS*, \$2.99
(42 stories & photos)

MY HONEY GAVE A SHOUT as I was heading out: “Going to the post office? Don’t forget your stick!”

If you live up here and like to walk, you’d better pack a whacking big one. Back when I still drove to fetch the mail, I spied an older lady with a stick as tall as she was. She cast a wary eye in my direction as I drove slowly past, trying not to shower her with dust. At the time I figured she suspected my intentions from the fact I was actually obeying the speed limit, but now I know the truth: She probably thought I had my *dogs* with me.

I didn’t, of course. Lady the Wonder Dog, a white German shepherd mix, had gone to doggy heaven years before. My experience with her had taught me dogs were noble, loyal beasts possessed of wondrous joy and courage. The local variety is, well, different.

The first time I walked to the post office, I saw what surely seemed to be a dog—short-haired, whitish-tan, weighing maybe 30 pounds—except it lay beside the road all covered with dust and didn’t move or twitch, not even when the school bus lumbered past. I ambled closer, tensing for the stench and wondering why there were no flies. As I came within a foot or so, it raised a sullen snout up from the dirt and fixed me with a pinkish stare. “Hey, pooch!” I said with a smile, whereupon it slowly rose, paced nervously back and forth behind me once or twice, then scuttled off into the weeds.

Not a good sign, I reasoned. This was confirmed when I rounded a curve a hundred yards farther along and there she was. A sharp-eared, pointy-faced, black-and-white mutt with impossibly swollen tits, she shot out through a hole in the mangled fence surrounding a sad adobe and proceeded to bark insanely, making repeated runs at my ankles. I went into full dog-tamer mode, squatting down and saying, “Good dog, goood dog” in a low-pitched, reassuring voice, which only heightened her hysteria. In the bare dirt yard behind the fence, a small white curly-haired beast, cute in any other context, ricocheted back and forth on the end of a short, rusty chain, yipping furiously. The pointy-faced ringleader ran back and forth in front of me, eyes red with fear and pain, whipping her nipples through the dust and looking for

an opening. Her wretched pups emerged from hiding and ran around in circles. The din was merciless, but of course no one came to lend a hand or see what was the matter.

By this time the commotion had attracted three or four other bedraggled canine vigilantes, and I knew that I was licked. Shaking my head, I stood up and resumed my walk. The crazed, panting mob followed me only a short distance down the road and then retreated quickly to wait for my return.

The same scenario has repeated itself, with variations, every single day we've gone to get the mail. On the way back from one early encounter, I stopped in at the Valley Store to ask the proprietress why anyone would ever keep such a dog. My arrival having been preceded by the daily ruckus, she not surprisingly anticipated my remarks and spoke up first: "I don't know where that dog comes from!"

"The nasty one with the puppies?" I asked.

"Yes, that one. Somebody came by and dropped her in the road, because she was pregnant, you know. I guess somebody's feeding her. I don't know where she belongs."

So much for that!

I took to carrying a long stout stick on subsequent walks and learned a few more things about the evil pointy-faced one: the first time I placed the pole across her throat to push her away from my leg, I had the distinct impression that she liked it. A stroke is a stroke, after all. The second time I had the pleasure, I caught her in mid-bark and was rewarded with a satisfying strangled gurgle that made my day. The third time she met my stick she tried to eat it, and that's the way it's been ever since.

When I'm not there the ragged pack keeps fit by chasing cows, and when I am I use my latest curse: "Back! Back! Back to hell from where you came!" The neighbors peer from curtained windows and cross themselves, but the dogs seem strangely reassured, as if relieved to know their provenance.

But I still take my stick.

Self-Propelled Geranium

From *BUFFALO LIGHTS*, \$2.99
(42 stories & photos)

LAST WINTER IN OUR ADOBE COTTAGE, I had a most extraordinary experience.

I was working at my computer when I happened to glance over toward the far wall. There by the steps leading up to the bathroom, something definitely moved. I peered into the gloom, saw what it was, then sat there dumbstruck for several seconds until my brain caught up with my preconceptions: a rat! A great big motherfucking brown rat! Land of Enchantment, indeed.

A freaking rat, holy shit—I'd lived a lot of places, but never with a rat. There wasn't any doubt about it, though: An actual r-a-t had just appeared and run into the back room. I reached for my trusty Crossman 760 Powermaster air rifle, slid a .177 pellet into the chamber, and pumped nine times. Then "click," off with the safety, and into the darkness I went.

As soon as I flipped on the lights, I heard but did not see a skittering "*whoosh*"—damn, it must have run into the closet. I pulled back the curtain and eased the tip of the barrel behind a cardboard box. There he was, all right, just not enough of him to risk a shot. I shifted my position ever so slightly, and *whoosh!* Again, no rat. I swear I saw nothing move, but the rat was gone, just like that.

The next night at about the same time, he appeared again. I heard a scratching sound behind the piano, and sure enough, out came a surprisingly big rodent, not more than four feet from my chair. The rifle was leaning against the wall, but when I swiveled around to reach for it, the varmint disappeared. "*Scritch, scritch...*" Aha, the closet again. I decided to call in reinforcements and threw Hobbes the Wonder Cat inside. Result? Nothing. But he figured out something was there and took up a watchful posture in the hallway. Later during my bath, I heard a crash and a scuffle. When I came out, the cat was sitting there looking stupid with no sign of a rat anywhere.

The next day I set out rat traps, one in the attic and one in the closet. The landlady said to use peanut butter, but guess what? Rats don't like peanut butter, at least not served on traps. This one liked Burt's Bees Bay Rum Shaving Soap though, as I found out the next morning. The following night made history.



I was sitting at the computer again, this time with my rifle in my lap. All of a sudden I heard a frantic scrabbling in the corner behind me, off to the left. What the—there was nothing there but some houseplants and a pile of wood for the second stove, so why would anything—Whoa! Would you believe it, *a geranium hopped over the woodpile and ran under the bed!* I'm talking 15 inches worth of stem, leaves, and blossoms, folks, half a whole geranium (with a tail) under the bed where my wife lay sleeping. I grabbed the cat and tossed him in after: nothing! I walked to the other end of the bed and stamped my foot on the floor to frighten the thing back toward Hobbes. This naturally woke up my wife but accomplished little else, so after a long moment, I got down on the floor to peer under the bed with gun and flashlight: there was the Wonder Cat, staring blankly at half a geranium, *sin raton*—these suckers are fast, all right. I left the plant where it was and went to bed, leaving the worthless cat to stand guard. The covers were thick and heavy, and I pulled them way up.

The next morning I checked under the bed: the blasted geranium had moved all by itself another two feet toward the closet!

Hobbes had nothing to report, so I re-baited the traps, with cheese this time, and that's where matters stood for a while. Two nights later, I heard a loud "*clack*" in the attic. Oh, yeah.

Later that same day I deposited the carcass outside under a bush, and a mere six hours later *Señor Raton* disappeared for the last time down the gullet of a grateful coyote.

(Make a note, please: geraniums might work as well as cheese.)



The Spirit of a Place (and How to Find It)

From *BUFFALO LIGHTS*, \$2.99
(42 stories & photos)

IT ALL STARTED simply enough.

We'd wanted to return to Cebolla Mesa, a stunning, isolated vastness less half an hour to the north, ever since we first discovered it on New Year's Day. We'd come upon the place quite by accident, having turned off the main road and launched the truck down a forest service track in search of God knows what. What we found after a winding three-mile ride across the mesa was awesome solitude and silence on a rocky overlook some 600 feet above the Rio Grande.

Beyond the dusty parking area and a group of picnic tables was a scene no suburb could provide. Giant lichen-covered boulders and eroded slabs of rock led to the edge of a frightening precipice and drop-dead vistas, with nary a fence or guardrail to be seen. At the farthest edge of the cliff, away from the trees and out of sight of the parking lot, was an obvious gathering place. Someone had dragged one of the heavy wooden tables at least 200 yards, set it next to a natural depression in the rock face, and built a ring of stones to hold a campfire. What a great spot for a party, I realized. You could do anything there, and someone surely had. It was also an absurdly dangerous spot for a picnic, and I could only shake my head at the wildness and freedom of it all. We poked around a bit, I took a few pictures, and we headed back to the parking lot.

Walking up to the truck, we spotted a trailhead we hadn't noticed before. According to the sign, it was only a mile or so down to the river. From the top we could see a series of lazy switchbacks descending into the gorge. Mighty tempting, but we'd left the house quite spontaneously and needed tougher shoes and coats. Another time, we vowed.

That was then, and this was now. We both had a free afternoon, the sun was shining, and most of the snow from the previous week's storm was gone. Why not take that hike? From everything we'd heard, the bottom of the gorge was a very special place: sheltered from the wind and warmed by the sun, the banks of the Rio Grande provide a unique habitat for all kinds of wildlife, including bears, mountain lions, and migratory water birds. I could hardly wait! Besides, local lore had it that secret hot springs and sacred shamanic sites lay quietly hidden

among the huge boulders and side canyons. There was more to ponder, too.

For one thing, we'd been told that the entire immense chasm had been created as a result of the cataclysmic collapse of a natural dam holding back a prehistoric inland sea in southern Colorado. Whether this was true or not, we had no idea, though it hardly mattered at the time.

The gorge was in fact extremely narrow and self-contained, with steep walls and few approaches, just as if it had been dug out all at once instead of over time—if you knew the region and the lay of the land to the north, it was easy to imagine such a geological force. There were also numerous reputed paranormal connections to the giant rift valley: UFOs, cattle mutilations, and persistent whispered rumors of mysterious underground military installations. Oh, that gorge.

Not really knowing what to expect, we laced up our hiking boots, grabbed our coats, stuffed snacks and water bottles into the old red L.L.Bean rucksack and jumped into the truck. In short order we were headed north. Once we passed our old home in San Cristobal, we didn't have far to go: one curve, another, a short dip, and then a long climb to the top of Garrapata Ridge. "Cebolla Mesa, 3 mi." the sign said, so we hung a left and hit the gravel. My '87 Ford F-150 is just about perfect for poking around the back roads in this part of the world, and I felt I was in my element.

There was no one else in sight. We cruised easily a short way around a long dry curve and entered the *piñon* and juniper. Oops! The trees had shaded the road from the winter sun, and the snow lay deep and scary on the shoulders. The road itself was snow-packed and icy, something I hadn't expected, but we seemed to be fine. "We'll be out of this soon," I offered helpfully, knowing that the road would soon slope down and cross the open, sun-drenched terrain leading to the gorge. After a few more turns, we burst out of the woods, cleared a rise, and both screamed out in unison:

"MUD!"

As soon as we saw it, we were in it. For as far ahead as we could see, a sinuous ribbon of chocolate-colored goo glistened in the sun. I had no choice about whether or not to take the ruts, either—we were rolling down the hill, splishing and splashing, and I knew there was no turning back. I could feel the suction tugging at the tires, but there was traction of a sort, and at least we were moving forward. As we neared the bottom of the hill, I turned to my wife and said bravely, "Well, we'll have to build up a good head of steam to get through that section on the way back!" She

just shook her head, rolled her eyes, and dug her fingers even deeper into the seat cushion. I knew I was in trouble inside and out, but there was no time for tending to the relationship. We hit a long flat stretch, and the ruts got even deeper.

As it turned out, this was academic. The entire roadbed was the consistency of fresh wet cement, a heavy, granular, bottomless pudding. We slowed alarmingly, rear wheels spinning furiously, and began swinging sideways. In less time than it takes to tell, the truck was 45 to 60 degrees across the road, but still in motion! Ruts were irrelevant as I spun the steering wheel from lock to lock with no effect whatsoever, and there was no way to tell which direction the front wheels were pointed. The astonishing thing was that we were actually making progress: the engine roared, the rear wheels spewed a torrent of slop, and the truck kept moving, nearly sideways, down the road. Ye gods!

This was a totally new experience, and the novelty of it all was oddly calming. I knew I had to turn around and get us out of there, but for the moment there was nothing to do but keep going. On and on we scraped and slithered, at little more than a walking pace. As I sawed the wheel back and forth incredulously, the front tires would momentarily line up with one rut or another, grab, and straighten us out for a second or two before the rear swung out again in the other direction. At one point we were all but perpendicular and still moving. I couldn't explain it—and still can't—but the old 2WD Ford soldiered on, blowing bushels of muck all over the sagebrush. What was that strange feeling, I wondered? And then I realized that despite the noise and the adrenaline, I was almost having fun! Here and there were huge pits where other fools had gotten stuck and somehow dug themselves out, but I paid no mind: we at least were sliding down the road, and that was all that counted.

After about a mile of this insanity, the road turned right and crossed a large cattle guard. Eureka, a turn-around spot! I stopped atop the grid and opened the door to lean out and visually orient my front wheels for the first time since we'd hit the mud, then by carefully backing and turning, I positioned the truck for escape. I had to leave the security of the cattle guard for half a length before I could gun the big straight six, but fortunately it worked. With considerable spinning and sliding, the pickup lurched itself in the general direction of the way we had come, and we were on our way back to what passed for civilization—going sideways, of course.



As should be clear by now, we made it—just don't ask me how. It was every bit as ghastly going the other way, but at least we

knew what to expect, and soon I would be a hero. The relief I felt when reaching the pavement was enormous, of course, but tempered by concern for my truck, which had never seen the like. I drove straight for the Questa car wash, where three full cycles failed to clean off all the mud. By then I was exhausted and out of quarters, so we hit the local coffee shop for latte and espresso to celebrate.

What does all this mean, exactly? If we had gotten stuck, our only recourse on the deserted mesa would have been to wait until nightfall when the mud froze up again. By then we might have frozen too, or the tires become solidly encased. Hiking out at 10 degrees, in the dark, without a flashlight, could have saved or killed us, either one. Yet there was no sign, no warning posted, nothing that suggested anyone but suicidal maniacs should not take that road that day. This land belongs to God, you see. Nature rules, and everyone obeys or pays the price.

You can't dial 911, your cell phone will not work, and even if it did, no one could come to rescue you. Sure, it's scary, but on the other hand it's real. The babble of the crowd just covers and distracts. You may feel safer in a world of streets and lawns and sidewalks, but are you? This is the way the world truly is, beneath the civilized veneer. I've rarely felt so much alive or wide-awake as in this place, and this is why I came.

In a land of mud and spirit, the danger is a gift.

Compulsion

From *TAOS SOUL*, \$2.99
(62 stories, 3 photos)

THE MUD WAS LIKE a dirty magnet, a “black hole” of clay that pulled everything into it. Out here in Llano, it had already driven me quite mad.

Day after day we drove through slop that only needed draining. I wanted to stand out in front of people’s houses and beat on pots and pans until they came out and told me why a minute with a hoe was such a hardship. Fortunately I didn’t, and no one shot me. One hole was too much for me, however. Not far from the house, someone had backed a huge lumbering truck out of a corral, leaving a perilous gouge in the public road. For three days I tried creeping along the rim of the abyss, only to slide down inside every time, slathering brown goo and rocks all over our shiny white new car. That ups the ante, right? It has to. On the evening of the fourth day, I stomped down the road with a shovel and filled the hole with dirt from the shoulder, crazy longhaired gringo flinging gravel in the dusk. It felt good, though: I was in a burying mood.



A month ago the timing belt on the Dodge Spirit let go and left my honey shaken and stranded in the middle of a muddy road. A sheriff’s deputy happened to come along right behind her and pushed the car off to one side so he could get by, which was the high point of the day. I got her out of there with my ’87 F-150, and we left the old car she’d inherited from her mother sitting in the mud for the AAA truck to tow to a garage. When we heard the estimate—reasonable enough, as it went—we decided to let the battered relic go. So much adventure, so little time.

The next week, the mesa melted. The big Ford churned through the slop with careless gusto, but the road was a disaster, and once I almost got stuck just 200 yards from the house. We missed a garbage pickup, then the paper. Our delivery lady just couldn’t make it, first through the mud and then the awful ruts, so she left the newspaper wrapped in plastic on the ground beside the nearest stop sign. My wife actually walked down the road in her bathrobe to retrieve it—early in the morning, while the mud was still frozen—but that only worked the first time. For the next four days, the neighborhood devil dog carried the papers away before she got there. Finally the plucky paper person tried *hanging the*

wrapped paper from the stop sign, and this worked once. I would rather have hanged the dog, but right about then the road began to dry out a little, and everyone went home.

That's when my wife and I looked at each other and decided to buy a new car. Brand-new, as in unused, straining tribal orthodoxy all around. ("Oh! You got a *new* car..." said a neighbor.) She'd already had her epiphany while sitting in the dead Spirit, waiting to be rescued. I had mine when the Friday Motors salesman told me we could finance the 2007 Vibe we were looking at for zero percent and no money down. Things were moving: I held a gun to the weather, but it made no difference, and a few days later we brought the white Pontiac home in the mud.



Last week I raided a neighbor's sand pile to fill puddles in the only two places I could park. In this neck of the woods, dead cars are to burglars as garlic and crucifixes are to vampires ("so it looks like someone's there"), and they occupy the high ground, so I figured I could just plead sanity if cornered. As it turned out, that didn't work, much like, "Sorry, but I had to shoot your mule to feed my dogs." Terrible, but who can quit? Now I stalk the road with my shovel, knocking the ridges into the ruts and piling stones in the low spots, me and a million other peons somewhere mucking in the dirt to fix a road...

That's what the winter's probably done to lots of us. Let's hope spring gets here before the cops.



Windshield

From *TAOS SOUL*, \$2.99
(62 stories, 3 photos)

TUMBLING BLINDLY THROUGH SPACE toward a bug-splat rendezvous, they come. I came. More will.

“You won’t recognize this town,” goes the refrain, like a bullet to the brain. Indeed. But Taos is a midge, a gnat. It’s not just here, it’s everywhere the dingbat cretin white man’s heart decides a buck is better than a plaque beside the Pearly Gates. The collective mind is gone, but on we babble, like Alzheimer’s of the species, running on obsolete, corrupted software. We Anglo zombies aren’t in this all alone, of course. The Japanese never saw a whale they wouldn’t eat, Nambe Pueblo’s caved to Vegas, the Chinese think ecology’s for girlie-men. Here in Llano, people dump basura on the mesa, leave Bud Lite ATV-scat on the trails. I found a bag that had a license plate. That’s traceable, you know. So everybody’s guilty. It’s like we failed the test, and no one cares—enough to make you rape and steal, loot the store, and cram the chocolates in your mouth before the Big Guy pops your silly watermelon head.

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

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

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

The methane junkies want to blow it up for good. "New energy sources!" "Progress!" "You can't fight change!" Except it isn't change at all, just more of the same old calcified refrain, the babbling of a body left without a mind. Change would mean we paid attention to what was in our hearts instead of selling gas and jerky to roustabouts. Isolation's done the work before, but too few of us to mess things up is just blind luck, not being smart. That's shifting, so if you don't want to fight, go find a beach somewhere. Moving to Taos to retire is like swallowing a live grenade for indigestion, anyway.

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

Natural Born Killer

From *TAOS SOUL*, \$2.99
(62 stories, 3 photos)

“AAAGHH!” she screamed.

“Are you okay?” I shouted from the bathroom. (I was not in a position to render assistance.)

“Yes... but THERE’S A MOUSE IN MY PURSE!” she yelled back from the living room. Just at that moment there was a loud rumble of thunder: the afternoon storms were making their appearance. “I’ve got to go get the clothes!” I heard her say, and then the screen door slam as she hurried down to our clothesline by the acequia.

It’s a good thing I couldn’t hurry anyway, because the moment demanded savoring: it was the first time in my life I’d heard those words from anyone, and it would probably be the last. A mouse in her purse? A real, live mouse?!?

When I got to the living room, she was still outside grabbing the laundry off the line. There was her big red purse sitting open on the low banco next to the table, and everything looked normal. I peered cautiously inside: nope, couldn’t see a thing except the usual wallet, keys, eyeglass cases, cell phone, makeup kit, Kleenex, and Lord knows what. Nothing in there to make a lady scream, certainly. Just then Callie the Wonder Cat wandered into the next room looking bored. *AHA!* I thought, *I’ll see what she can do*. In my experience this never works, cats not liking direction of any kind, but these are not normal times. I quietly eased over and scooped up cat. Supporting her weight and holding her firmly by her hindquarters, I walked her over to the purse and poked her nose inside: instantly it was as if something had grabbed her head and wouldn’t let go!

I still couldn’t see anything to be excited about, but I set her all the way down on the banco and stepped back. Her head never lifted out of the purse. She sniffed here and there, then batted the outside of the purse rapidly on both sides, something I’ve never seen a cat do—a ruse to spook the prey, of course. All of a sudden, she reached way down inside the purse, and WHOOSH flipped a BIG FREAKING MOUSE six feet in the air! The mouse landed and shot for the other side of the room, running right between my legs, but Callie was faster! WHAM, grab, got it! She moved so fast, I literally didn’t see her. There she was,

though, with the doomed mouse clenched trembling in her jaws.

“You wanna go outside with that?” I asked, opening the screen door. Of course she did, and I went after, intending to snatch the victim away like I usually do if I can. She wasn’t having any of that this time, however, growling menacingly and biting down even harder on the squirming mouse. I could have gripped her by the scruff of her neck and shaken it loose, but I also felt like she had earned it this time, so I let her go.

In less than 90 seconds, she was back at the screen door licking her lips, waiting to be let inside. I did so, and half a second later, along came my honey with the clothes. (Let me tell you guys, if you ever want to make a woman really grateful, just get a live mouse out of her purse. Works every time.)

The questions remain, however: where did the little bugger come from, and how long had he been *in* there? This could be a New Mexico thing, or at least a Taos phenomenon, considering the four-inch gap underneath the screen door in our old rented adobe.

“Pet-free”? Hell, no.

That’s bringing a knife to a gunfight.

Message for the Fourth

From *TAOS SOUL*, \$2.99
(62 stories, 3 photos)

THE LAST TEN MILES of rocky trail going down into the canyon took at least an hour, most of it in first gear.

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

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

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

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

I also remembered the raven.

It happened early on. I was standing on a rock next to a tall Ponderosa pine on the edge of a precipice at the actual entrance

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

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

No politics, but think about it. I did.

###

About the Author

Visit my [Amazon Author Page](#) »

John Hamilton Farr is the author of *BUFFALO LIGHTS: Revised Edition*, *TAOS SOUL: Love Stories, Heroes, and Wild Adventure*, and dozens of columns for *Horse Fly*, a monthly Taos newspaper. He has published relentlessly online since 1997 and currently writes at 7,000 feet from Taos, New Mexico, U.S.A. For more information about John, please see the [About](#) page at FarrFeed or his [Contact](#) page at JHFarr.com. Visit [Zoo Pilot Publishing](#) for a complete catalog of books by John Hamilton Farr and links to ebook stores.



Don't miss these!

[FarrFeed.com](#) (author's blog)
[FotoFeed.com](#) (NM photo blog)
[FarrFeed Video](#) (YouTube channel)
[JHFarr.com](#) (administrative HQ)
[Twitter](#) (@TaosJohn)

Zoo Pilot  Publishing

TAOS, NEW MEXICO, U.S.A.