



Insider's Look at Grand Canyon

Webisode #42 – Interview with author Dana Wildsmith Transcript

Ranger Patrick Gamman: Welcome to another webisode of Insider's Look at Grand Canyon. I'm Ranger Patrick and I am joined here with our artist in residence, author Dana Wildsmith. Welcome to the show Dana.

Author Dana Wildsmith: Thank you, it's great to be here.

Patrick: So, we have had a lot of types of artist in residence come here. And a lot of folks understand when we have a painter, a photographer, but you're an author. You know, you applied to be the artist in residence here, it is very very competitive. What do you think the connection was for you being an author coming here?

Dana: Well I think, first of all when people hear that I am artist in residence they immediately say, "What do you paint"? I have to say, no no, authors are artist too. I really believe that writers can do the same type of work as any visual artist. Because all an artist does is interpret what they see. And we are trying to interpret the Grand Canyon in a way that the visitors who come here can see what they are looking at in a larger view. Because they look at something, they see it.... Well let me give you an example. I was talking to the people at the Shrine of the Ages evening program. I started by asking them, how many of them had bought souvenirs, how many of them had bought a t-shirt, or a mug, or taken photos, for example? Most of them raised their hand. I said, "What you thought you were doing, was taking home just some sort of tangible reminder of your trip." Actually what you were doing was your subconscious was trying to make a "bookmark in your brain" of a time when you grew, when you became larger than you were before. Because you saw this, you interpreted what you were seeing in some way that had significance in your own life. And therefore your understanding of the world became larger. Something inside of you says remember this moment, don't forget it. And that is what you are doing when you take photos, when you buy souvenirs you are making sure that you don't forget this stepping forth point in your life when you became larger in your understanding of the world than you were before. That is what artist do all the time. They try to create these "bookmarks" for you in the form of a painting or in the form of a piece of writing.

Patrick: You have been doing your writings here at the Grand Canyon, would you be willing to share with our audience, could you read something for us that you have written?

Dana: April 13th, 2010.... 4am and wide awake in the bunkhouse. Snug as it is possible only inside of a really fine sleeping bag. But, I unzip myself from that cozy comfort and hit the wood floor scurrying purpose. Today I was hiking Bright Angel trail. All 9.6 miles, and my flinging off of comfort was portent of the day. The day could not have dawned more gloriously. Yesterday's blustery storm had cleared and cooled the air. I dropped my sleeping bag off for a mule to haul up along with a bag of dirty underwear and socks, a flashlight, two t-shirts, and a book I had stuffed in the stuff stack to cut down on my packs' weight. I bounced on down the path cheery with the lightness of the load and the lightening of the sky. I took a step onto the Silver Bridge, the "other" suspension bridge, linking Phantom Ranch to the world above and... OMG there was no wooden plank lining the steel mesh floor of the bridge. Just mesh, open weave mesh, frighteningly open mesh, vertigo inducing open mesh... for oooo, an 1/8th of a mile or so across the raging Colorado River! I set my sights on the canyon wall ahead and thought magnetic thoughts of stone pulling me safely over. Never once, did I, could I look down. Two miles along the river's edge the trail wanders prettily and easily through sand. So pretty, and easy, and level was the trail that I think, as I often have, while interstate driving of the writer Erma Bombeck who wished that the department of transportation would post frequent signs stating, "Yes, Erma you are still on the right road." I was still on the right road, but I had to stop and pull my trail guide out to convince myself of that. After the hike down, no offence Kaibab (*trail*), this easy stroll through increasingly lush and almost tropical terrain seemed too good to believe. For the next couple of miles, columbine springs flow out of the cliff to nourish an Eden of riparian vegetation. Warning to anyone I call Mama, don't read the next three words; I was alone, for the first four miles of the hike. So I was not worried about talking out loud to myself exclaiming over and over with the masterful employ of words one would expect of a writer, Oh

Wow, this section was so greenly generous to my eyes that it fed my soul as well as the breakfast eggs had filled my stomach. So, I fairly raced along, even up Devil's Corkscrew. A malicious set of upward switchbacks, not that I have ever known any switchbacks anywhere to be other than malicious. At Indian Garden, a slightly over halfway mark I called home, yup had cell service again, to smugly report that it was 8:30 and I was half way up. Piece of cake I assured Mama, I'll be up and out by noon. O' but all the gods that be purely love it when we say things like that. Another mile or two and a little thing called altitude, started having its' way with me. And my legs and back were tiring down a bit. The rain we had had at Phantom Ranch reached the upper elevations as snow. Snow which was now slushing and icing on the trail and mixing colorfully with green mule dung. At one and the same time this smelly bright muck sucked my boots into its' depths with each step and also tried to fling me over the canyon wall with its' surface slickness. This seemingly bewitching trail condition reached its' peak just as I started up Jacob's ladder. A Biblically ever skyward series of switchbacks. And as I climbed, my evil brain inwardly sang on endless loop repeat; "We are climbing Jacob's ladder, we are climbing..." As if I needed to be reminded that every round went higher higher, lordy, but I was tired! I began to stop every half hour, then every fifteen, and then every ten to stop the pounding in my chest. Sue, the delightful lady I had met at Phantom Ranch gave me pep talks, telling me landmarks to watch for, and how close each one would indicate I was to reaching the rim. And Brian, a quite gentle chiropractor, walked with me a long way claiming that he had never had the chance to; "Walk with a published author". But really he wanted to give me heart through companionship. I loved them both for their company and faith almost as much as I increasingly despised the day hikers now filling the trail with their clean perky selves. "Ya, you start where I started and see how spiffy your white Nike hiking tights look then honey"! A few minutes later and I no longer cared about how clean the day hikers looked or how mud and dung splatter I looked; I was there, on the rim, easing myself to the low stone wall by Kolb Studio and waiting for Sue ten minutes or so behind to join me. And amazingly there were people staring at me, not with disgust, but with delight. They wanted to hear that I had made it from the bottom that I had hiked the whole way up. I had, I told the nice couple hanging over me where I sat. Will you take my photo; will you take one of me and Sue together? And then I called Mama.

Patrick: Dana, you have been doing some great writing here at the canyon. If folks would like to actually do some reading of your works, what is your website?

Dana: I try to make it easy for people, it's; www.danawildsmith.com and if they want to check out the Grand Canyon journal, just go to the website and click on "articles" and click on "Grand Canyon journal".

Patrick: Dana, I want to say thank you not just for doing this podcast, but for also being an artist in residence at the Grand Canyon trying to help connect people to this amazing... one of the wonders of the world. Thanks for being on the show.

Dana: Thank you.

Patrick: We'll catch you folks next time, on Insider's Look at Grand Canyon.

