

moves across it. Yet, I wait, knowing what lies beneath that surface, trusting that the current of words will move through me again.

Ursula Hegi, the author of "Stones from the River" and "Salt Dancers," teaches at Eastern Washington University.

Touched by fire

STEPHEN J. PYNE

■ The things that make the West what it is make it a place that burns. The land speaks in tongues of flame.

Explorers striking the Plains met prairie fires, roaring out of the West. In one form or another, that burning

continued to the Pacific. Fires swept out corridors of travel, drove back brush from grasslands, thinned woodlands, splashed the Rockies with aspen, choreographed the movement of bison, pruned berries and basket twigs. Fire on the mountain,

smoke in the valleys—these were as much a part of Western majesty and violence as grizzlies, Grand Canyons, and flaming sunsets. Wildland fires have savaged Yellowstone and the Sierra; ex-urban fires, Malibu and Spokane. Eventually everything that can burn does.

Our fire practices are an index of our relationship to this land. Native people shaped nearly every nook and cranny with the fires they applied and withheld. American settlement broke those regimes, while the creation of the public lands created new habitats for fire. Then came the millennial 1910 fires, centered in the northern Rockies but sprawled across the West. They wrote a new narrative for fire and an argument for fire suppression that we

are still retelling. The West's fires affect people no less than biota. For those of us who have known it firsthand, the firefight is a rite of passage, and fire season a coming of age.

The West will burn. We have found that fire is as ecologically powerful removed as applied. Most of the West now suffers a fire famine, or at least a maldistribution of fire—too much of the wrong kind, too little of the right. Fire is not something the West much tolerates: it is something the Western landscape demands. It is as basic as water, and fire season as indispensable as the summer rains. Sooner or later, lightly or brutally, the fires touch us all. *Stephen J. Pyne is a professor of history at Arizona State University. He is the author of "Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire" and "Fire on the Rim: A Firefighter's Season at the Grand Canyon."*

The Golden Hotel

WILLIAM KITTREDGE

■ To my mother's endless consternation, my father had an affinity for frivolous trips. To quiet her, he would take me along. Without plans having been made, we would stay out overnight.

When I was about 8, he took me to the Cedarville Rodeo in northeastern California, where we ran into Butch Powers, a Surprise Valley rancher who later became the state's lieutenant governor, a convivial man. After the rodeo was over, when we were supposed to be well on the road toward home, we ended up in a Basque cafe, the Golden

Hotel, an old two-story frame building under the cottonwood trees on the main street of Cedarville. I recall bright faces in that room with its yellow-painted walls, families at table. They all laughed when my father said, sure, go ahead, drink some wine like the other kids.

“To my mother's consternation, my father had an affinity for frivolous trips.”

— William Kittredge

Later, I woke up sick in the wood box beside the black ironwork stove in the kitchen. One of the cooks was washing the last of the dishes, soapsuds to her elbows. The dining room was alive with the talk of a half-dozen men who were playing cards, my father among them. His face shone in the lamplight as he laid down his cards and rubbed the top of my head, looking around to his friends like someone blessed, and the child I was—even half sick and disoriented—saw how they loved him, and even me.

What I did was pile some coats on a bench and go back to sleep. I don't know how we got home, but I remember how my mother laughed when we got there, and said it was all right this once, since nothing could go seriously wrong at the Golden Hotel. Despite all, everything since, I still believe that there for a little while I was lucky enough to inhabit as much of paradise as I ever expect to know about.

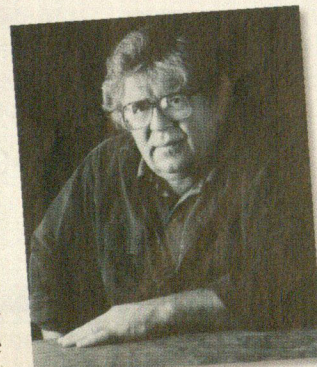
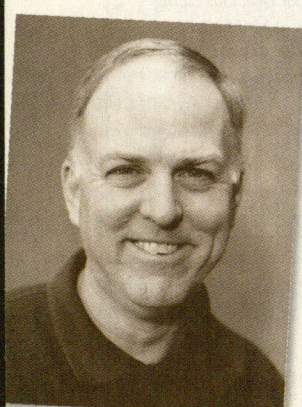
William Kittredge is the author of "Owning It All" and "Hole in the Sky: A Memoir." He lives in Missoula, Montana.

Spirit of Cibola

RUDOLFO ANAYA

■ Did Francisco Vázquez de Coronado miss the boat? I think he did. In 1540, Coronado and a hungry, weary band of Spanish explorers reached the Rio Grande in northern New Mexico. They were searching for the fabled Seven Golden Cities of Cibola.

What the Spaniards had stumbled upon were the great Pueblo Indian nations of the Rio Grande. Coronado found Indian pueblos made of mud and stone, natives who farmed the



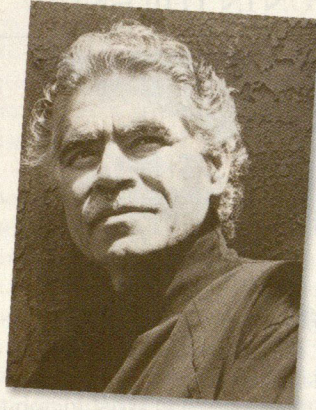
ABOVE: ASU NEWS BUREAU RIGHT: MARION ETTLINGER

fertile fields of the valley, raising corn and squash.

I can imagine Coronado turning to his dusty and tired companions and mumbling, "These are no golden cities. Onward." Onward they moved, searching for Cíbola as far east as Kansas, north to Taos, west to the Grand Canyon. What motivated them were the fantasies of the time, legends that painted pictures of fabulous cities.

The expedition was deemed a failure because no gold was found. Looking back we know the Pueblos had something even more important than gold: corn. Later Spanish expeditions arrived and learned to subsist on corn and the bounty of the land.

There was another gift that evolved in Cíbola, the spiritual synthesis of two world views. Pueblo Indians and Mediterranean people grew to understand that *los santos son las kachinas, las kachinas son los santos*. The saints are the kachinas, the kachinas are the saints: This syncretic view created a harmony of what were once conflicting



“Cíbola is more than history, it is a land imbued with spirit, a spirit we continue celebrating.”

— Rudolfo Anaya

religions. This, not gold, is the legacy of Cíbola.

Coronado had found Cíbola, but he didn't recognize it! No need to blame him, for few can look into the future and map its contours. Perhaps all of those ancestors would rest easier if they knew Cíbola came to be the birthplace of the Nuevo Mexicanos. Cíbola is our home, our *sipapu*, our place of emergence from this earth we hold dear and sacred.

For us the promise of Cíbola is real. We keep the memory of our ancestors, we honor the earth that gives us sustenance, we treasure the water for the fields, and we observe the presence of the folkways in everyday life. Cíbola is the spirit of the place, an essence that throbs with vitality.

Cíbola is more than history, it is a land imbued with spirit, a spirit we continue celebrating.

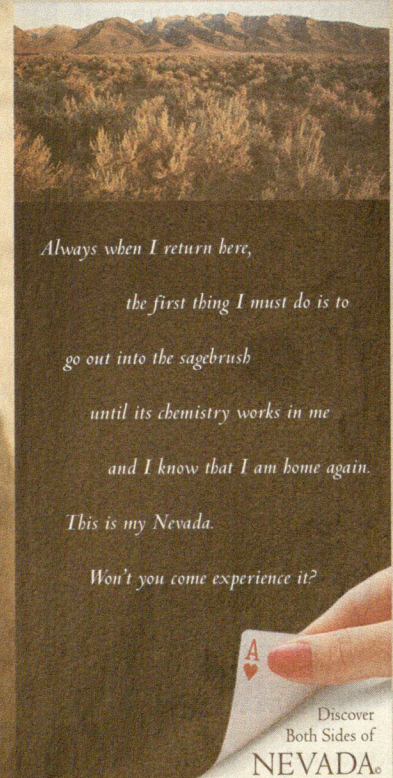
Rudolfo Anaya is the author of "Albuquerque," "Aztlán," and "Bless Me, Ultima." He lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. ♦

MARION ETLINGER



-Robert Laxalt, Author

THE SCENT OF
SAGEBRUSH
ALWAYS
BRINGS ME BACK.



Always when I return here,
the first thing I must do is to
go out into the sagebrush
until its chemistry works in me
and I know that I am home again.
This is my Nevada.
Won't you come experience it?

Discover
Both Sides of
NEVADA®

The Ruby Mountains, 20 miles south of Elko - Respect the land we love.

Nevada is a land of unforgettable people and adventures. Get your free vacation planner by calling 1-800-NEVADA-8 or visit us at www.travelnevada.com.