

This is a collection of forty-four previously published articles by Idaho Press Club award-winning journalist Kate Reynolds Yaskot. The articles are about the lives and history of the people who call Teton Valley, Idaho their home. From Native Americans, trappers, and Mormon settlers to present day artists, mechanics, extreme athletes, organic growers and beekeepers, these are their stories, as they are the Voices of the Valley.

Voices of the Valley

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Voices of the Valley

by

Kate Reynolds Yaskot

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ISBN 978-1-60910-650-8

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Printed in the United States of America.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2011

First Edition

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HAUNTINGS

Teton Valley Top to Bottom Winter 2000/2001

It's one thing to sit around a campfire and share ghost stories with friends, trying to have the scariest tale to tell. But it's a whole different story to actually live in a haunted house, as I did with my husband Greg. When I wrote this piece, the Internet as a research tool was still in its "infancy" stage, compared to what's available today. To check to see how it has changed, I Googled "haunted places in Idaho". Ten years ago, I found a few references at a few sites. Today, the Shadowlands website referenced in the article yielded many more haunted sites in Idaho than when I did my early research. They have an Idaho Haunted Places index and among the numerous haunted places, it cites a hospital in American Falls, an old café in Arco, a dorm room at Boise State and the Ammon cemetery in Idaho Falls. Without giving away the ending of the story, I'm happy to affirm the last sentence of this article is still true.

In the beginning it only happened when one of us was alone in the house. Eventually it didn't matter if we were by ourselves or together.

"It" began about a week or so after my husband, Greg, and I moved into an old house near Third Street in Driggs in early July 1997. At first I began to have some odd experiences, but it was nothing I could quite put my finger on, just brief things that made me wonder if my imagination was in overdrive. I'd catch a quick glimpse of colored sparkles out of the corner of my eye. I'd hear weird noises – some sounded like footsteps, but it was an old house, I'd tell myself; squeaks and creaks were to be expected.

We were the first people to move in after the former owner died of natural causes in a room that was to become Greg's study. The place had been vacant for a while, but some of the owner's possessions were still inside. For example, his old cowboy hat hung in the basement on a hat rack.

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That is, until Greg moved it.

After he moved the hat, the paranormal activity we thought we were imagining intensified but also became specific, without-a-doubt encounters of the psychic kind. Greg's experiences were the most intense, and although he was never a believer in the paranormal before, his opinion was definitely altered by his experiences. I already believed, from other past experiences, that paranormal activity exists.

A few weeks after we moved in, Greg asked me if I had any strange experiences in the house. For him, all kinds of things were happening – a door opening and closing without human assistance; cards flipping in a box, as though someone were rifling through them; a 5 a.m. encounter with an apparition of a little girl standing in the doorway of his study, glowing with a silvery shimmer.

Perhaps his weirdest experience was when he distinctly felt a “terry-clothed hand” press down firmly on his foot while he watched TV one night in his study. Most of the paranormal activities occurred in this room. It was where the cards in the box started flipping; our cats refused to enter this room.

My most frightening experience involved something that happened at the back door. It was so scary because it was so real.

The house's back entrance leads into a mudroom, with several stairs connected to an inner door. The former owner used a wheelchair, and a wooden ramp had been installed over the stairs to facilitate his entry into the house.

I was alone one day, working on my computer, our two cats curled up on the carpet in the kitchen. The house has an open layout, with no walls separating the kitchen, computer room and living room.

Suddenly I heard loud, deliberate “boom-boom” noises coming from the back entrance. The sound was so distinct my eyes naturally shot in that direction. Then I looked at my cats – both were sitting straight up, very still, staring intently at the back door.

The whole experience was probably over in just a few seconds, but it felt like many minutes. My mind started racing as I tried to

figure out what was going on. What was that noise? The bang? Thumps? I kept thinking it reminded me of something, but what?

Suddenly I knew. It sounded like a wheelchair moving up a ramp – a distinctive thump as the wheels hit the plywood and clunked down on the concrete steps. Then the bump noise as it moved up the ramp. As this realization washed over me, my body froze. When the adrenaline started rushing through me, the paralysis of fear began to subside. But I was too afraid to go near the back door.

I ran out the front door and around to the back and saw that the outer door was closed. I peered through the windows and saw that the inner door was closed too.

Then I started to tick off all the things that could have accounted for the noises – but I ran into a dead end. There was no wind, the doors were closed and nothing had fallen onto the floor.

I had no explanation for what happened – that is, no logical explanation. Regarding an illogical explanation, I knew the answer.

Our house was haunted, and I had just been introduced to its ghost.

“Ghost” is politically incorrect in the vernacular of the world of the paranormal. Our resident was actually a poltergeist, which means “noisy spirit” in German. In general, poltergeists are usually held responsible for making noisy disturbances and moving or misplacing objects.

A wide variety of Web sites provide information about paranormal phenomena studied in the field of parapsychology, some boasting thousands of links relating to ghosts, poltergeists and haunting.

One site, www.zerotime.com defines entities and experiences associated with the paranormal.

A ghost is defined as the “disembodied spirit of a dead person, conceived as appearing to the living as a pale, shadowy apparition.” For comparison, a wraith is a guardian ghost, a spectral figure of a person supposedly seen as a premonition before that person dies.

Zerotime defines haunt as both a verb and noun – to visit often or continuously, and a place that is frequented by ghosts. A

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haunting involves ghosts of deceased human beings, appearing frequently in certain places and times in areas known to the deceased before death.

The Consciousness Research Laboratory (www.psiresearch.org) defines parapsychology as the “scientific and scholarly study of certain unusual events associated with human experience. More precisely, it is the study of phenomena suggesting that the assumption of a strict separation between the subjective and objective may be wrong.

“Human experience suggests that some phenomena occasionally fall between the cracks and are not all purely subjective or purely objective,” the definition continues. “From a scientist’s point of view such phenomena are called anomalous because they are difficult to explain within current scientific models.”

The Consciousness Research Laboratory site notes that many parapsychologists feel the strangest and most interesting aspect of parapsychology phenomena is that they do not appear to be limited by the known boundaries of space or time.

“They (the phenomena) blur the sharp distinction usually made between mind and matter,” the site explains.

If this concept starts to conjure up the comic images from the movie *Ghostbusters*, with Bill Murray and Dan Akroyd, check out the Web sites of organizations established to scientifically research and investigate places suspected to be haunted. Many feature details and photos of both investigations and hunts – a far cry from celluloid portrayals.

For the uninitiated, a ghost hunt involves going to a place where, although there have not been sightings of ghosts, such sightings are likely. Then the hunters try to catch images on film – either video and/or photos – and record sounds and gather eyewitness accounts. Graveyards are listed as the number one place to start.

A ghost investigation involves frequenting a place suspected to be haunted and then assembling data via video, still photo and audio; recording temperatures and humidity; and obtaining interviews and other evidence to prove or disprove the haunting.

Such an investigation often involves helping the spirits move on and out of the place.

One of the oldest organizations in the country dedicated to ghost hunting and investigating is the non-profit South Jersey Ghost Research, founded in 1955. Their Web site, www.sjgr.org, gives detailed accounts of investigations with photos and equipment used in research. The organization provides property owners of investigated locations with a free report of findings; it also offers training to people who want to become either a ghost hunter or a paranormal investigator.

In our region, the nearest ghost hunter groups include The Salt Lake City Ghosts and Hauntings Research Society and the Utah Ghost Hunters Society. They offer similar services and information, and their Web sites, www.ghrs.org/slc/ and www.ghostwave.com respectively, link to other sites including South Jersey Ghost Research and The Shadowlands.

The Shadowlands site, www.theshadowlands.net, lists haunted areas throughout the United States. Among haunted sites in Idaho are the Emmett Middle School, where the ghost of a former music teacher has been seen in the halls, and the Boot Hill Cemetery in Idaho City, where many of the people buried there met violent deaths still walk the grounds.

As one might gather, all ghosts or poltergeists are not as friendly, sweet or playful as the cartoon character *Casper*. And not all people who observe and interact with ghosts are parapsychologists.

The Web sites define a parapsychologist as a scientist or scholar seriously interested in the paranormal. This person may not necessarily be considered a psychic as well, which implies the ability to respond to extraordinary forces (not just study them).

Sylvia Browne has been working as a psychic for 47 years and has appeared on the *Montel Williams Show*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, CNN and *Entertainment Tonight*.

In her book, *The Other Side and Back, a Psychic's Guide to Our World and Beyond*, Browne writes that she prefers to visit a site

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cold, so her impressions are not tainted with information she learns before being there in person.

Browne also notes her distinction between a ghost and a spirit – ghosts do not know they are dead. “For their own distinct and very personal reasons, ghosts refuse to transcend to The Other Side and insist on staying earthbound”, she says.

“Spirits, on the other hand,” Browne writes, “have already accepted their death and transcended to The Other Side. When they visit us, it’s from another dimension, which generally makes them more difficult to see and hear clearly.”

She describes one way to picture the difference between the vibration frequency of ghosts and spirits is to consider an electric fan. “When it’s off, you see its still blades. That’s us, in this dimension,” Browne writes. “Turn the fan on low, and the blades whirl just enough to make each individual blade harder to make out but not impossible if you concentrate. That’s the ghost’s dimension.”

“Turn the blade to its highest speed. and the blades move so quickly that they become almost invisible. That’s the spirit’s dimension, existing in a speed/vibration that the normal eye can’t perceive.”

“The next time you wonder why you should believe spirits are around when you can’t see them, ask yourself if you stop believing a fan has blades every time you turn it to high,” Browne writes.

She also discusses dark entities in human and spirit form. In spirit form they can be chaotic, wreck havoc and even cause physical harm to people.

In our house we were never harmed by our ghost. When he was active, it was disconcerting, but we never felt anything negative from his presence. Although we never became totally accustomed to his presence, we ultimately came to a point where we co-existed in the house and respected his presence.

When we finally figured out that the intense paranormal events were triggered when Greg moved the ghost’s hat, we immediately put it back on its rack in the basement. And then, almost as quickly

as the activity had started, it settled down. But it never completely stopped.

Unfortunately for Ann Palmer of Driggs, her paranormal experience was far from pleasant. Her office was located in the old train depot building in downtown Driggs. When she began working for Nelson Communications Group in summer 1997, she occupied the front reception area. Vice president Kevin Slagle had offices upstairs.

Ann said that in the beginning her experiences occurred only when she was alone in the building. She would hear sounds distinctly similar to someone walking up a flight of stairs. The footsteps were so loud she thought it was Kevin coming in the back entrance. Ann would call out to him or go up the stairs to deliver his messages, only to find the office empty.

"It never occurred to me to think of any ghostly activity", she says. "I'm pretty logical. I would just shrug my shoulders and go on with my work."

But then one day, after working at the Depot for several months, one of four light globes in her office crashed to the floor, breaking into pieces of hot glass. Concerned, Ann and Kevin climbed a ladder and checked the remaining three light fixtures. They were each held tightly in place by five screws.

About two weeks later, a second globe fell to the ground while Ann was sitting at her desk. This time, a local electrician was asked to check the globes and replace the other two. The electrician told Kevin and Ann that the other two light fixtures were secure, adding that he had to work very hard just to loosen them for inspection. The electrician could not find any reason for the other globes to fall; none of the screws were stripped and he couldn't detect any structural weaknesses that would result in another accident.

Eventually Sharyn Hastings was hired by Nelson Communications. Ann moved to an office in another part of the building and Sharyn took over the reception area. After working for a month, Sharyn asked Ann if she thought the building might be haunted.

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“All of a sudden, the hair stood up on the back of my neck,” Ann says. “I asked her what happened to make her ask that.”

Sharyn mentioned the same sounds Ann was hearing – footsteps going up the stairs and sounds of someone working on the upper level. Sharyn also felt slightly uncomfortable at times, as if she was being observed. Soon, the two were joking about the “Depot ghost”, who seemed to favor spooking females who worked in the reception area.

Soon after their discussion, a third globe fell behind Sharyn’s desk while she was working. “If I hadn’t been leaning over toward the fax machine, it would have hit me,” Sharyn says.

Then one day, Ann was again alone in the building. She had been working for several hours on a research project using Sharyn’s computer.

“I’d been working for most of the afternoon,” she recalls. “Then I became aware of a humming noise. I assumed that the lawn-care crew had arrived and turned on the hose. After about half an hour, I discovered that the cold water in the bathroom had been running full force. I turned off the water, sat down, had a serious case of the ‘heebee-jeebees’, and left for the day.

Only a few weeks later, Sharyn was talking on the phone with a client, jokingly discussing the Depot ghost and how she and Ann thought the ghost was male due to the mischievous nature of its tricks. As Ann looked on from the doorway, the fourth globe came crashing down on Sharyn’s computer, missing her head by inches.

Later that month, the client Sharyn had been talking to when the last globe fell happened to visit the Driggs office. She was a firm believer in spirits and the paranormal and said she felt the presence was a female ghost from the early 1900s; the ghost did not like women and felt the building was hers.

Several days after the client’s visit, Ann and Sharyn were lunching on the Depot’s front deck. Suddenly they heard loud, blaring music. Shocked, Sharyn realized the music was coming from her car, parked directly from where they were sitting. This particular Saab model needed the key in the ignition to turn on the radio. Sharyn pulled the key out of her purse, showed it to Ann, then

used it to turn off the car radio. Nelson Communications Group employees vacated the building following the sale of the company. Ann is unaware of any complaints of paranormal phenomena from current renters.

She is unable to explain the incidents that occurred at the Depot. "I suppose it could have been a series of bizarre coincidence," she says. "But I'm not ruling out an angry ghost."

I know what I experienced was real, and ditto for my husband. I also know some people don't believe in the paranormal and think unless you can see, smell and touch something, it doesn't exist.

When it was time to move, I decided not to take any chances. Logical or not, I wasn't sure if a ghost could travel or maybe move on to a different but familiar place. All I knew was that our new house was located on property that was previously part of his parcel of land.

Before I walked out of that empty house for the last time in October 1999, I made one final, and very loud, request of our ghost: "please don't follow us to our new house," I implored.

So far he hasn't.

AGRICULTURE EVOLUTION

PART ONE OF A FIVE-PART SERIES

May 29, 2009

Teton Valley News

This series had an amazing beginning because initially I thought I was going to write a one-shot article for the TVN Visitor Guide. A piece something along the lines about agriculture in Teton County. Sounded like a no-brainer. But four hours later, after talking to my friends Tye Tilt and Chris Pennick, I realized I didn't have just one article, I had many, and, in fact, that was how my first "series" of articles was born. In those hours of conversations, Tye and Chris really educated me about the history of the evolution of agriculture in this Valley. I was immediately hooked on the topic and went to Lisa my editor and pitched the topic as a series instead of an article. I told her I didn't have just one article, I had at least five. Ultimately, I won the 2009 1st Place Award from the Idaho Press Club for a series in a weekly paper - the reinvention of agriculture in Teton Valley – or "How Teton Valley Grows".

In years past, crops farmed in the valley were "commodity crops" and were shipped to other markets and not grown for local consumption. Today, agriculture in Teton Valley is tied to the consumer and its awareness of eating nutrient-rich food and the importance of such quality of food upon health and wellness. In this respect, Teton Valley farmers and consumers mirror a larger national movement regarding food sustainability and various offshoots of that movement, such as Slow Food in the Tetons (as opposed to fast) and educational programs for young and old alike. The Junior Master Gardener program, offered at MD Nursery, is the first and only such program in Idaho and is patterned after the state's Master Gardener program. Erika Eschholz, Full Circle Education, teaches classes at local schools in the valley, in part through the creation of gardens planted and harvested by children.

Kate Reynolds Yaskot

Most people would agree, farmers and non-farmers alike, that agriculture is not the way to make a lot of money, especially in Teton Valley. Harsh and extreme weather conditions, a very short growing season and where you are physically located in the valley all factor into a situation where more odds are against you than for you in terms of making a living.

In the very early years of the first settlers of the valley, most families had their own gardens and grew their own food. Commodity crops, such as seed potatoes, barley, wheat and alfalfa, were later grown and shipped to other markets. In recent years, the boom of the real estate market saw many farmers cashing in their farms for large tract subdivision projects.

However, in a relatively short time period of time, 13 years for one farmer – Jed Restuccia, owner of Cosmic Apple Farms - a number of small local farms have sprouted up in the valley and have significantly grown in size and production. The demand for organic produce and livestock by local consumers exceeds the supply of what local farmers can produce, according to Restuccia.

Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA, emerged nationally about 10 years ago. In its purest form, a farm was owned by community members who hired a farmer to raise their crops. The success and failure of the crops were risks shared by the members. Now, the more common operation involves a farmer offering a number of shares to a community, typically in the spring when the farmer's cash flow needs are highest. Members purchase a share up front and in exchange receive a box of vegetables each week throughout the season.

While CSAs are one form of "farm-to-consumer" venue, other local farmers sell directly to consumers through the Teton Valley Farmer's Market, the Jackson Farmer's Market and local stores such as Barrels and Bins in Driggs and Jackson Whole Grocer.

Whole Grocer sells a variety of locally grown and produced products and this summer has plans to showcase the items every Wednesday in the front of its store. Steve Michel, director of sustainability at the store, said they keep prices tied to what they pay for organic items so that local farmers can make more money.

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Buying local is “smart” on a number of different levels, he explained, and many factors add up to what the item will ultimately cost, including fuel and transportation costs. Locally produced items from Teton Valley sold at Whole Grocer include Tye Tilt’s Mountain Valley Mushrooms.

The demand for locally grown organic food has steadily increased over the years, and many consumers have taken the time to educate themselves about the health benefits of such products. Although there is no way to scientifically determine how many people in Teton Valley either engage in producing organic crops or buying them, if she had to guess, Chris Pennick, newsletter writer for Cosmic Apple, would say maybe 20-25% of the valley’s residents are involved somehow in sustainable farming. “Consumers are better educated now”, she said, and want to know where their food comes from and are aware of the nutrient deficiencies of industrial produced crops. She said there’s also an increased awareness in people wanting to be less dependent on foreign food, particularly after 911.

But local farms in the valley produce much more than seasonal crops. Snowdrift Farm, owned by Sue Miller and Georgie Stanley, offer organic eggs and will raise goats in addition to their produce. The Harold and Ken Dunn family have ranched here since the 1970s and raise grass-fed Angus cattle. Their beef products are sold locally in grocery and health food stores.

While there may be less farmers involved in agriculture now than in earlier years, those who are engaged today do so with a fervor, with many benefits to the community. Teton Valley is fortunate to be home to so many creative individuals who practice sustainable farming, and have “reinvented” agriculture in this community.

COLONY COLLAPSE DISORDER

PART TWO OF A FOUR-PART SERIES

February 4, 2010

Teton Valley News

*Fortunately Greg is a packrat and in his library he had what's probably a first edition paperback of Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*. Re-reading it, I never knew she was a marine biologist and came under viscous attacks by DDT manufacturers for her predictions of the consequences of a "silent spring" in the future. Another predictor of the dire state of today's bee was Rudolf Steiner, the father of biodynamic agriculture. In 1923, he spoke about the future effect of mechanizing forces that previously operated organically in the hive in one of a series of lectures he gave to an audience of workers. A commercial beekeeper in the audience became agitated about Steiner's remarks, to which Steiner simply replied – let's have this conversation in about a hundred years from now. Strange, but true, that time is about now, and if we continue to lose massive quantities of bees, our entire food supply will be starkly affected.*

"Man's attitude toward nature is today
critically important simply because we have now acquired
a fateful power to alter and destroy nature.
But man is part of nature, and his war is inevitably
a war against himself."

Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, in a 1964 CBS documentary.

More than four decades have passed since the publication of Carson's book. A former marine biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, she exposed the hazards of the pesticide DDT, questioned man's faith in technological progress and helped set the stage for the environmental movement. She meticulously described

how the powerful pesticide DDT entered the food chain and accumulated in the fatty tissues of animals and humans, and caused cancer and genetic damage. Although the book initially enraged the chemical industry, Carson and *Silent Spring* were ultimately vindicated after President John F. Kennedy ordered his Science Advisory Committee to examine issues raised in the book and DDT was eventually banned.

In November 2006, something very strange started to happen to the honey bees in the U.S. and mysteriously, whole hives of worker bees vanished, leaving behind the queen and grubs or babies. Also strange was that the abandoned hives were left alone by other insects in the area, which normally would have entered the hive to steal the honey. Although bees have periodically disappeared since the 1880s, disappearances in the past were very localized and very short term, according to May Berenbaum, entomologist at the University of Illinois, during a *Scientific American* Podcast on August 14, 2009 (www.scientificamerican.com/podcast). She said “this particular disappearance, which we came to call colony collapse disorder (CCD), was unprecedented in its severity and magnitude. By 2007, CCD had been reported in at least 35 states.” One of the most puzzling aspects of CCD is that unlike bees who die from various causes, with CCD there are no “dead bodies” to forensically analyze to determine a cause. She noted that every year half of America’s honey bees, 1.25 million, travel to California just to pollinate almonds.

Berenbaum said that many theories have been put forward as to possible explanation of the disorder – stress on the bees getting trucked thousands of miles around the country to pollinate crops, decreased immune function due to poor nutrition and being fed high fructose corn syrup instead of honey and pollen, new parasites or diseases, pesticide poisoning through contact with plants that have been sprayed or ill health due to poor hive management.

In an article by Joshua Palmer for the *Times-News*, posted on the Internet December 8, 2009, he states that “according to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture” (ISDA) “bee colonies in

Idaho have plummeted almost 40% from 130,000 in 1989 to about 80,000 in 2009”.

Idaho does not have a mechanism for reporting suspected cases of CCD, said Mike Cooper, deputy administrator of Plant Industries Division of ISDA. Beekeepers have to register their hives and the number of bees in their colonies. That registration would show declines. Cooper said another factor of the decline is that many beekeepers have advanced in age and have been retiring, and those numbers haven't been replaced with younger beekeepers. He said some subsidies are in place to compensate some beekeepers for their losses through the Farm Service Agency. As to the cause of CCD? Cooper said that the “general consensus is that there is no consensus” among those in the industry. He said that although the state is seeing a decline in the number of commercial beekeepers there has been a great increase in the number of “hobbyist beekeepers” and beekeeper clubs around the state. He said some have run into problems with counties over the legality of having a hive or two in their backyard. He said one group has been battling with the Bonneville county commissioners over the past year which has zoning regulations requiring hives to be located only on agriculture land. He said in some places, the ordinances have been changed, such as Salt Lake City, to allow backyard beekeeping. Around the country, many hobbyists have starting having hives, he said, “on roof tops in the cities”.

Some beekeepers in Teton Valley have noticed the presence of CCD in their hives but have no actual “proof”. Deirdre O’Connell has worked with bees for 12 years. In the fall of 2008 the bees in one of her hives vanished. She suspected CCD because “it was too late in the season for a normal swarm and zero bees were left in the hive.” O’Connell said she found “some interesting ‘chat rooms’ and blogs on the Internet regarding CCD.

Although CCD has been observed and researched in this country since 2006, it's a very different story in France, where the disappearance of colonies was noticed in 1994. The “French Connection” angle is documented in one of the best authorities I have come across, Michael Schacker's *A Spring without Bees*. This

book reads like a detective analysis from A to Z of what has happened with the honey bees and without appropriate intervention, the calamity it poses to our food production should the demise of the honey bees prevail.

In France, ultimately the protests of some 3,000 beekeepers led the French government to ban the use of a certain insecticide imidacloprid (IMD) in 1999, when Minister Marc Galvany directed that IMD be suspended from use on sunflowers until further tests could be made. The ban was aggressively fought by Bayer CropScience which had spent \$150 million developing IMD. It lost its suit to have the ban cancelled.

IMD is a chlorinated nicotine-based insecticide or neonicotinoid, similar to DDT, and according to Schacker's book, it's designed for insects and is relatively safe for humans and mammals. French researchers found that as little as a few parts per billion of IMD in the nectar or feed supply could make a honey bee groggy, impairing its short term memory in smell and theoretically blocking normal foraging. It's designed to block an insect's nervous system from operating properly. IMD also stays in the soil for a number of years.

Following the ban, the big question was whether the bees would return and it took until 2005 for bees in certain regions to make their come back, according to the book.

All in all, Schacker raises many questions in his book that are difficult to digest, and for anyone seriously interested in the future of our food production, it's a must-read. Probably the most disturbing of all his questions is his postulation - Is IMD our generation's version of DDT?

PAINTERS OF THE VALLEY

PART TWO OF A TWO-PART SERIES

September 9, 2010

Teton Valley News

One of the most enjoyable and meaningful aspects of this interview was being introduced to the Why Beauty Matters video that I watched many times on my computer. It is not only very moving but goes to the heart of how pivotal beauty has been to man and his spirituality throughout civilization. And although there are other feature articles that I've written that aren't in this book, to me it's most fitting that I conclude this book with this article. Because Beauty does matter, it matters to me and I have seen first hand how ugliness can affect a person's psyche. Beauty and the vastness of the West is the reason I moved here and why I stay here. The beauty of nature and wildlife has had a very positive effect on the development of my own creativity. It was very enlightening to meet Scott and Bart who gave me additional insight about the importance of beauty and what they try to capture in their paintings.

Why Beauty Matters. This very short but provocative and profound video was created and narrated by writer and philosopher Roger Scruton, who has studied the importance of beauty throughout civilization in art, music, poetry and architecture over the past few years. It is provocative because there's a simplicity in its premise -Why Beauty Matters - and it's profound because of the recognition that humans, as spiritual beings, need beauty in their lives, and if this need is ignored, Scruton says, we'll find ourselves in a spiritual desert.

Scruton talks about how beauty has been central to our civilization for over 2,000 years and that philosophers have argued that through the pursuit of beauty, man shapes the world as home. Scruton says that if you asked a person during the years 1750 - 19th century, what was the aim of poetry, music and art, the answer

would be “beauty”, and that beauty was considered a value as important as truth and goodness. Artists and philosophers throughout civilization have recognized that there is a universal need of human beings for beauty. He discusses how artists have long known that human life consists of chaos and suffering and that their remedy for this is beauty – beauty has the power to be a consolation during times of sorrow and is an affirmation during times of joy.

However, in the 20th century, he points out, beauty as an aim of art has been replaced with a “me consciousness” – my desires, my pain, my pleasures, me-me-me which has resulted in a self-centered, provocative and disturbing cult of ugliness. Scruton sees the loss of beauty in our lives as putting man in danger of losing his sense of the meaning of life.

Scott Christensen, an internationally acclaimed painter, presents *Why Beauty Matters* to open and set the philosophical tone of his 10-day artist workshops held at his beautiful studio in Victor. A native of Lander, Christensen lived in Jackson for 20 years and led a fast paced life creating art pieces for collectors and galleries.

Christensen said he has always had a love for landscape painting and most of his work is started outside and then much larger pictures are created in his studio from the smaller sketches. “I love being outside”, he said, “ it’s all about harmony, colors, temperatures and you never have the same light.” He said his art is a never ending process and that he’s in constant competition with himself.

However, over the past years Christensen realized that he needed a change from the fast- paced gallery life and together with his business manager and wife, Kristie Grigg, bought land in Victor and built their studio, which also provides living accommodations for artists in residence. Grigg said “Scott realized he couldn’t keep up the pace of the demand for his work, and at the same time be able to consistently produce his best work. He is very prolific, is self-taught and has studied the work of the Old Master painters.”

They have been offering the workshops, about two to three times a year, for four summer seasons. Grigg said the intent of the

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workshops is more about creating an atmosphere and quality of environment for artists that is reminiscent of the numerous artist colonies that have existed around the world for centuries. Grigg said that historically, artist colonies were places where artists could come together and share their ideas, techniques, and philosophies with other artists which created lasting bonds of camaraderie.

Their latest workshop, "Intensive Workshop", was held at the studio in July and was attended by about 40 artists from around the country. One artist, Angela Bounds, came to the workshop from Virginia, and described the experience as "an amazing opportunity and it was a luxury to be able to spend 10 days immersed and focused on one thing." She noted "I had a single focus, which was freeing." It was her first workshop with Christensen, whom she described as being an accomplished painter. "He's really the rock star in the art world. Ten days of being surrounded by Scott's work was inspiring", she explained, adding, "my favorite quote from Scott was "knowledge precedes execution".

Grigg said they are now in high gear at the studio putting together their first major exhibition of works by renowned artists and photographers. The event, "A Collectors' Salon Show and Sale", will be held on September 15 at their studio, is free and open to the public and the opening of the show begins promptly at 5 pm and ends at 9 pm. (Contact Kristie at 787-5851 for directions and information, web www.christensenstudio.com) Fourteen artists will be on hand to discuss their work, including Christensen, Tetonia artist Bart Walker and Jackson photographers Jon Stuart and Ed Riddell. Visitors of the event enter through a museum-like, high ceiling room which will display the biographies of the artists. The next room will contain one piece of art from each artist's permanent collection followed by a room where each artist has a piece which may be purchased. Grigg said she will be training five or six interpreters or "docents", another studio "first", who will be on hand to discuss the history of the artists and their work in the gallery rooms, along with herself and gallery assistant Heidi Kay.

Prior to the opening of the show, a special English traditional "driven shoot" has been organized for the artists by Lars and

Jennifer Magnusson, owners of Blixt & Company, who are also sponsors of this artists' Retreat and Exhibition. Footage of this shoot will be shown during the show on a big screen TV in the fourth room of the show.

Christensen said the Exhibition is designed by WRJ Design Associates, who have created designs for various artists and performers, including Barbra Streisand, Cher and Johnny Cash.

Grigg said that the Exhibition is not just confined to the studio rooms but continues outside where the artists have set up their easels and have been painting in a small field that borders a small pond for several days prior to the show. Visitors to the Exhibition will be able to stroll along special "paths" to the artists' easels to see their Plein Air "works in progress", affording a rare glimpse into the artists' creative processes.

Like Christensen, Tetonia artist Bart Walker is a nationally acclaimed painter who also paints in the Plein Air tradition and is one of the featured artists at the Exhibition. While "En Plein Air" literally is a French expression for painting "in open air", a more comprehensive description and discussion of this painting tradition can be found at the Plein Air Painters of America's website. There, the style of "painting from life" is described as a "pursuit unlike another other painting technique and challenges the artist to concentrate every sensory nerve" on what is before him or her and that the artists should forget about formulas and trust their own vision in finding truth in nature. The belief in painting in the Plein Air tradition is that through 'trusting your eyes', what you see in nature is not form, but rather light on form. In finding that truth, the artist makes sketches outdoors and then elaborates on them in the studio.

Walker paints in the Plein Air tradition, where you "can see things first hand and capture what you see". "It's very fleeting", he said, and changes in light happen so fast. Walker said he has been painting since he was about 12 or 13 and that his father and brother are also accomplished artists. Prior to devoting himself fulltime to his art, Walker was an accomplished designer and crafter of fine lodge-pole furnishings for 15 years. A resident of Teton Valley for

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30 years, he believes that it's a very spiritual place and in living here, he'll never run out of beautiful places to paint.

His website, bartwalker.com, offers a beautiful selection of his work, his shows and awards, and importantly his observations and feelings about his philosophy behind his creativity. He names Christensen and others as his "masterful mentors", noting "now that I know the basics I want canvases filled with my own spirit". At the website, one description that really stands out in summing up Walker's approach to his art, as it notes "His is the excitement that rocked impressionists when they realized that not only the glories of color, but also the splendors of light could be captured on canvas."

Walker has assisted Christensen at his artist workshops and has viewed *Why Beauty Matters* several times. He sees some modern art as being bizarre which isn't aesthetic and it doesn't uplift a person's spirit. He explained that what motivates him and other artists is that "we don't want to reproduce it [what we see], we want to share our experiences with others to create beauty."

This is a collection of forty-four previously published articles by Idaho Press Club award-winning journalist Kate Reynolds Yaskot. The articles are about the lives and history of the people who call Teton Valley, Idaho their home. From Native Americans, trappers, and Mormon settlers to present day artists, mechanics, extreme athletes, organic growers and beekeepers, these are their stories, as they are the Voices of the Valley.

Voices of the Valley

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