



Another Vagabond for Beauty

By Andy Sabin, GRC Board President

An old friend died on March 15. When I saw him in hospice for the first time after all these years, I knew he'd be older – I certainly was – but I was still shocked. He recognized me immediately, said hello, and we sat and reminisced through a microphone for 15 to 20 minutes. He couldn't really hear, his voice was high and weak, and this vital and strong man who was one of my best friends for more than a decade was now gray, gaunt, and 60 pounds lighter than when I knew him. But his mind and his humor were intact. He didn't like it, but he accepted his fate. He genuinely thanked me for visiting before drifting off into a drug-induced sleep.

Although pain medicine and cancer limited him to only minutes per day of interaction, I visited several more times over the next two weeks. I wanted to speak more to Clay, but I realized that that time had passed. I kept going back, however, to speak to an old girlfriend of his and his best friend from college. Both were keeping a bedside vigil. In addition to learning of an earlier bout with cancer, his poor financial straits, and assorted theories for why he distanced himself from friends and family in recent years, I also heard soaring stories of rafting trips chasing the ghosts of Powell and Everett Reuss, geologic work in the Western United States, backcountry camping in Utah and West Texas, and most importantly, of his tireless, sublime, and ever-evolving art.

When Clay lost his job, he tried to make a go of it as a professional artist. He was a brilliant photographer, painter and sculptor and created intricate inlaid wooden pots and baskets that mimicked Southwestern indigenous peoples' pottery and baskets. The breadth, complexity, and beauty of this work was a treat to learn about and see when some of it was brought to the hospice (see Figure 1). And apparently the volume of other work sitting in his rented house is staggering. The house is still in his name as a few friends and family attempt to inventory and curate this collection.

When we met decades ago, I was a slightly entitled, liberal-minded boy from the suburbs of D.C. and Clay was a gun-owning outdoorsman from the very conservative West Texas. But we hit it off immediately because of our mutual love of nature, music, literature...and of course, beer. Then, as now, I was also attracted to Clay because he was painfully honest; we shared similar passions and he was a principled human being. Even though I hadn't seen much of Clay over the last 20 years, I will miss knowing that he is around. And this loss of someone that few will ever know is equally poignant because of the type of person he was.

We live in difficult times. In no special order we regularly face out of control fires and flooding, famine and food deserts in major cities, pointless war on foreign soils and collapsing local economies. And we also have this virus that was predicted, ignored, and then politicized. Many of our key elected leaders are mangling their responsibilities in the most outrageous ways imaginable. The simple but vital character traits of someone like Clay are so foreign to these “leaders” that one wonders where we went wrong. Can we right this ship?

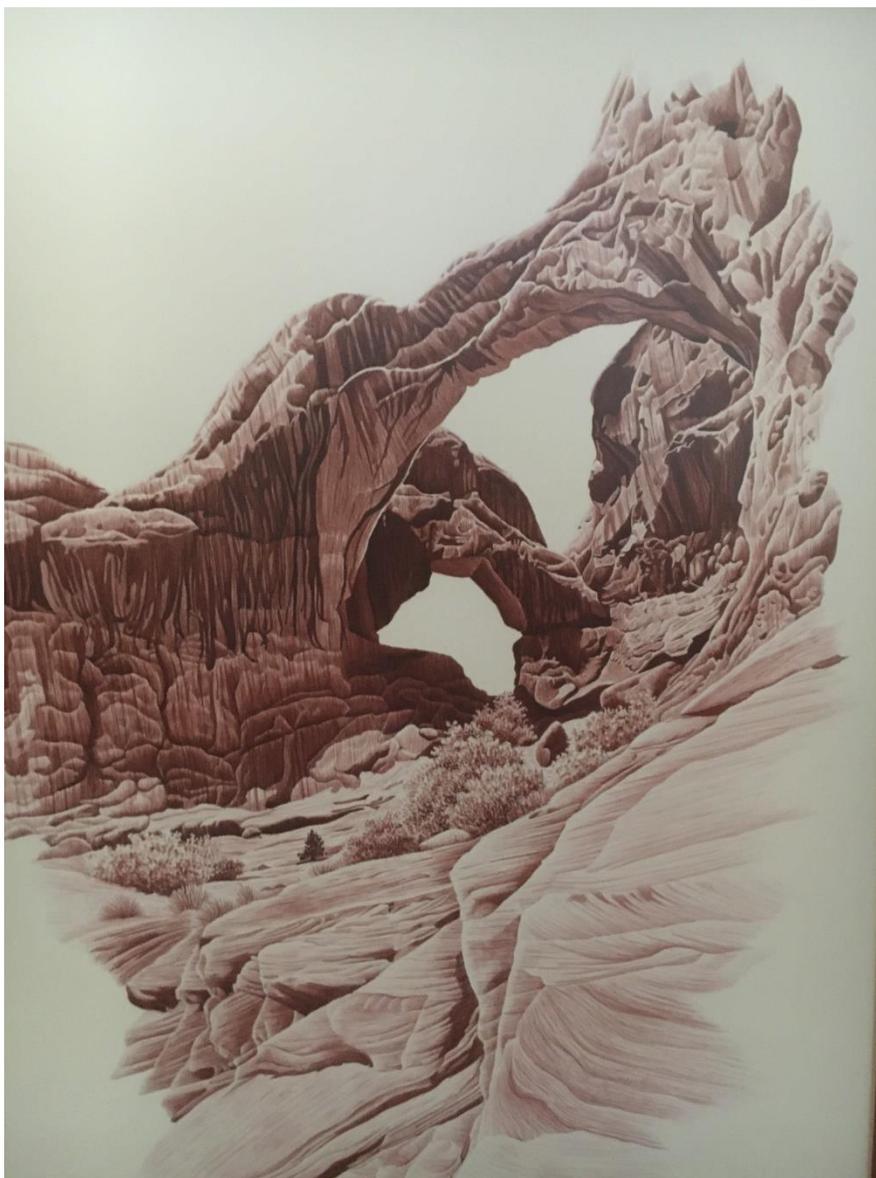


Figure 1: Pencil sketch of Double Arch, Arches National Park, Utah. By Clay Martin.

Fortunately, these people do not dominate the geothermal industry. Our industry, and in particular our GRC membership and leadership, is composed of dedicated, even devoted, women and men who want to advance the growth of geothermal around the world. We can't erase COVID, feed all the world's hungry, or quickly silence the vulgarities that

apparently now pass for political speech. But we can stay true to our principles, do our jobs, be good to one another, and lead by example.

I look forward to the ongoing planning for the GRC Annual Meeting still scheduled for this October. Depending on the developing circumstances, it may be partially to entirely virtual, and so will be accessible by the widest possible audience. Please stay tuned.