

Whale, Rain  
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Fall 1995  
Volume 8 # 4

It rains at Lees Ferry. We all stand around and think about how we knew him, when we saw him last, his beautiful voice, that dirty t-shirt with the whale on it, "Save the Humans," and that wonderful grin, the stories and memories. I first met him here, the last time I saw him was here. Hearing of his death was like hearing that a big river was gone, dammed and taken away. I look downstream, to the outlines of a scarcely visible Canyon, shrouded in mist.

It rains, fitfully at first, then harder; lightning with close, loud claps of thunder. His family and some of his many friends gather in the rain to express their love for him again. All who knew this man shared their love for him and his remarkably open heart. Brian Dierker said Whale's job was to listen, to witness, and he did it well. Perhaps his passing is to remind each of us to be better friends, better brothers and sisters. We cry openly in the pouring rain. The Canyon is completely lost in mist.

Whale knew what he wanted, knew what he was up to, launching his last Earthside trip. He made his choice, decisively and willingly. There was no place left for him to go but into the unknown, so he did. I don't understand much of what he was going through, the pain of losing identity and health and love. But I do know about the resolve he had, the way he made that decision, and what it took. I hope I have his resolve and humility when my turn comes.

His death is the journey that expeditions are all about: readiness for uncharted territories, of unknown duration and unknown consequences. Perhaps not all adventurers are driven as he was, but all seek a freer terrain, a deeper beauty and a larger state of grace than exists in the dust and blood and pettiness of the civil world. In leaving, he took some of each of us with him, and part of the Canyon as well. I give him now what he took from me, and hope it serves him on that new journey. The rain fades to drizzle.

I hope where he's gone is as awesome in its grace and subtle power as the Canyon he left behind. I hope he meets friends as dear as those he left. I only know I will miss him forever.

He is the rain.