



Up Front

A plus and a minus.
By C.J. Hadley

The Plus

I visited Zimbabwe last April, a country where there is always a sound, a smell, a sight that intrigues. Birds offer constant music, monkeys fly from tree to tree then sit and chatter, baboons steal anything that isn't locked down, and there is always exotic animal movement in the bush. Many are killers like lion, cheetah, hyena, elephant, crocodile and hippo. There are numerous snakes and huge insects and it's easy to get bitten by mosquitoes. Fifty percent of the pale Brits like me who moved to Rhodesia in the 1700s died of malaria the first few years.

I was lucky. I had an invitation to stay at the Africa Centre for Holistic Management, so I collected my retirement money and took off. I left Reno on Friday afternoon and didn't get to Victoria Falls until two days later. I was in one plane for 18.5 hours (made tolerable by South Africa Airlines). I lived in a hut made of dung and sand with a grass roof. There was no electricity, but taps in the compound offered running water. Cooking was outdoors. I spent time with cattle and I learned a lot. (See stories, p. 40, p. 44, and p. 48.)

The Minus

Tim Findley is dead. We met 16 years ago—two '60s liberals. He came out of nowhere (via San Francisco) and was living next to the Stillwater Indian Reservation in Fallon, Nev., with his wife and son. I came out of New York. I didn't know he was a hotshot journalist with a stellar reputation and our start was inauspicious. The first *RANGE* story he wrote, I spelled his name wrong—Findlay, the English version. It took me a couple of feature stories to get used to his writing rhythm and recognize his brilliance.

Findley respected readers. He didn't dumb anything down. Some say he is tough to read. Others salivate when they see his byline. It didn't bother me that the Black Panthers used to attend his barbecues in Sausalito or that he spent time in prison for a story for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

He made bizarre phone calls, introducing himself in weird accents. He sculpted or found most peculiar Christmas gifts. One year, a miniature of me was in a glass ball, which snowed when shaken. I got a hand grenade once and, last year, a sword.

Findley's special reports and features are marked by inspired writing. He scooped major daily newspapers with no editorial backup. One major report was "Nature's Landlord: The Arrogance of The Nature Conservancy." It was an extraordinary exposé that was mirrored by a major three-part TNC series by *The Washington Post*, which came out three months after his. (And the *Post* story took two reporters and several researchers over a two-year period.)

He was constantly agitated because we publish only quarterly. "I am newsman," he said often, and gruffly. I told him if I could find a quarter-million bucks I would publish bimonthly, but he was not impressed. He was used to the instant gratification of major dailies and television news. He found it agonizing to contend with our painful publishing cycle.

He had a gift of taking complexity and turning a massive amount of information into beautiful pieces of prose. There are no equals to his special reports—including one on Klamath Basin called "Water in the West"; his head-of-the-pack-by-years epic on the North American Union; his connecting-the-dots U.S./Mexico border piece called "The Ribbon"; and his "To Move an Ocean," about water-taking from eastern Nevada ranches for an uncontrolled, self-righteous and greedy Vegas. (For most of Findley's stories check www.rangemagazine.com.)

Findley was often tough to work with. He was high maintenance, a man filled with rage and increasing physical handicaps due to a life spent hard. But his gift never waned. One summer day, he came to the office wearing a toupee and a black suit and tie, looking like an off-the-wagon Mormon missionary. We went to lunch and it was about 100 degrees. His phony hair caused sweat to drip down his face as he intensely discussed his next story for *RANGE*. I asked him why the peculiar outfit. He said he was traveling incognito. "I'm undercover. I wanted you to know how I looked when I worked for Willie Brown at the California Legislature or went undercover at rock concerts for *Rolling Stone*."

For the past 16 years, he called himself "a reformed liberal." *RANGE* is lucky he was ours. ■

RANGE

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PUBLISHER/EDITOR: *Caroline Joy "CJ" Hadley*

DESIGN CONSULTANT: *John Bardwell*

SCIENCE EDITOR: *Chance Gowan*

CUSTOMER SERVICE: *Ann Galli*

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SOUTHWEST CONNECTION: *Kathy McCraine (AZ)*; ENVIRONMENTAL EDITORS: *Carolyn Dufurrena (NV)*, *Barney Nelson (TX)*; PHOTOGRAPHERS: *Linda Dufurrena (NV/OR)*, *Larry Turner (OR/TX)*; INSPIRATION: *Chet Mercer (WY)*, *J. Zane Walley (NM)*; *Tim Findley (NV)*; WEBLOOKERS: *Gail Brooks (AZ)*, *Carrie Depaoli (NV)*; COWBOY ADVISORS: *Don Coops (CA)*, *Ed Depaoli (NV)*, *Tom Wahlen (CA)*, *Carolyn Carey (CA)*.

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775-884-2200

FAX: 775-884-2213

1-800-RANGE-4-U (credit card orders)

Publisher/Editor: cj@rangemagazine.com

Freelancers: edit@rangemagazine.com

Advertising: ads@rangemagazine.com

Customer Svc: info@rangemagazine.com

Business: admin@rangemagazine.com

The Web: www.rangemagazine.com

Photos: www.cowboyswest.com

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