

STEWART BRANDBORG

Ernest Dickerman - Wilderness Advocate Supreme

Former Executive Director, The Wilderness Society.

My reflections on the life of Ernest Dickerman bring wonderful, warm and rich feelings for an incomparable friend and one of our nation's finest advocates for the American wilderness. In my early years with the Wilderness Society, beginning in 1956 as a member of the Society's Governing Council, I had learned from Harvey Broome of Ernie's work with the Smoky Mountain Hiking Club. It was in Knoxville that he had become a close friend of Harvey and Anne Broome, a friendship that had been nurtured through the years on hiking expeditions in the rugged wilderness of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park and in the warmth and hospitality of Harvey and Anne's home. It was here, and on the trail, that Ernie's love for wilderness gained its fullest philosophical dimension. Wilderness experience, its important place in our lives and in our society, was given substance through explorations with the Broomes, Benton MacKaye and Ernie's many other friends in the Smoky Mountain Hiking Club.

Ernie's love for the Smokies' wilderness was shared equally by Harvey and

Anne. Its protection against encroachment was a central focus of their lives as they strategized to assure its preservation. It was his close ties with Harvey that ultimately brought me a lifetime of friendship with Ernie.

Harvey was president of the Wilderness Society in 1966 when George Hartzog, Director of the National Park Service, announced his plan for construction of the trans-mountain highway that would have bisected the southern block of the Smokies' wilderness. This proposal, part of the Service's Wilderness Designation plan that contained destructive provisions for enclaves and development, was included in the Wilderness Law-mandated recommendations of the Service for designation of the Park's wilderness. This was clearly a precedent-setting threat, not only to the Smoky Mountain Wilderness but to all of the National Park wildlands that were subsequently to be placed in the National Wilderness Preservation System. With tremendous political support from Tennessee's and North Carolina's Congressional delegations, and local business interests who backed the highway and mass recreation developments in the Park, Director Hartzog had made the battle to sacrifice the

Smokies' wilderness the flagship in his campaign to defeat the Law's preservation purpose.

It was to no avail that I, as Executive Director of the Society, had joined Harvey in urging Hartzog to relieve this proposal of its wilderness destructive provisions. An astute political operative, with a strong alliance of Congressional and business interests supporting him, Hartzog was a tough opponent. Any hope of defeating this threat to National Park Wilderness had to come from conservationists in the region--and ultimately from over the entire nation--who could be mobilized in protest. Our challenge was that of finding the right person to head this campaign, one who could bring the issue home to people at the grassroots level to elicit broad public reaction.

I am unclear in my recollection whether Harvey or I first thought of Ernie as the best person for organizing this campaign. We agreed to ask him--for a modest stipend--to travel Tennessee, North Carolina and the Southeast, to meet with conservation leaders and groups--and every person who fell under his incomparable powers of persuasion--to proselytize for the Smokies' wilderness. Ernie's tireless efforts, in months of travel and speechmaking, built a broad base of opposition to the Service's plan. In testimonials, letters and appeals to Congress, people from all over the nation were brought together as one

voice in their defense of the Smokies' wilderness.

The measure of Ernie's success, portending his later achievements in wilderness preservation, came at the agency's public hearings in Gatlinburg, North Carolina, and Bryson City, Tennessee, when hundreds of witnesses overwhelmingly demonstrated support for the Wilderness Society's proposal as developed by Ernie. The message was delivered, loudly and clearly, to the National Park Service and the Congress. The American people stood steadfast for the preservation of wildlands within the National Park system.

I am sure that at the time, I had not fully sensed all that Ernie was bringing to the wilderness preservation movement. But it wasn't long after he had joined our Wilderness Society's Washington staff that I grew to know his great kindness and sensitivity to people, his wonderful gentility and warmth, and his powers of persuasion. These qualities almost unfailingly elicited positive response from all who knew him.

It was a great relief to me to have Ernie come to Washington at a time when the Wilderness Society was facing the tremendous challenge of advancing dozens of wilderness proposals over the nation. In the years that followed, I grew to know and love him as he became a lifetime friend. He was with me on the job every day with steadfast support, understanding of all

that confronted us, and an open-hearted willingness during stressful periods to share in many critical decisions for wilderness preservation and our public lands. His ownership was complete. He never failed to give his all out help.

Later in his Washington career, and soon after President Richard Nixon designated the 1970's as the Environmental Decade, Ernie led the lobbying fight of conservationists against the timber industry-sponsored National Timber Supply Bill. This measure had moved to the floor of the House of Representatives through a major campaign of industry with backing of members of the Nixon cabinet. From an office in the Rayburn House Office Building, Ernie co-ordinated a nationwide lobbying effort with some fifty volunteers whom he coached and guided in their congressional visitations and reports to conservation leaders in the members' home districts. His leadership in building opposition to this bill paid off in its resounding defeat on the House floor. If enacted, it would have inflicted egregious losses upon the nation's National Forests.

Ernie had led a fight that was crucial in setting early direction in the 1970's for the Nixon administration and Congress when many new precedent-setting environmental measures (the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, etc.) were

implemented. The Timber Supply battle epitomized his greatest continuing contribution in his untiring support of state and local leaders in meeting threats to wilderness and in designating areas for preservation. These gave us full measure of the "best of Dickerman".

Ernie worked with equal effectiveness on a one-to-one basis, in workshops or in the delivery of inspirational speeches. He instilled confidence, renewed energy and commitment, as he brought folks to full strength in meeting their issues. He showed them the steps for gathering the facts for their campaigns, for building constituencies and for winning public support through grassroots education and media exposure. And, with lasting effect, he trained others in the great art of influencing bureaucrats and Congressional decision makers. He shared generously his knowledge of the Washington bureaucracy and Congress where opposition had to be overcome. Throughout, his perseverance in working with opponents was an example for all.

In his Washington years, he succeeded in bringing dozens of Wilderness designations to fruition, with no slacking of pace upon his 1976 retirement from the Society. His achievements continued over two decades as he guided teams of local leaders who won wilderness designation for many areas in Virginia and the Southeast, and in

his frequent visits to Congress in response to calls to lobby for significant wilderness measures.

Countless numbers who received the benefits of Ernie's counsel and help will not forget all that he gave us. Nor will we forget his good humor, his loyal support and never-failing friendship. He left us with a great legacy of sweet gentility, with his knowledge that we will carry on in the battle for wilderness, that we will continue to reach out to others--as he did so

nobly--with loving encouragement and kindness.

"If you stand on the seashore, the horizon will mark the limit of your vision. But we all know that beyond the limits of our vision the sea stretches out to far corners of the earth. So we come nearer to the truth when we say that the horizon marks the beginning, not the end. Death is not the end, but a beginning."

Bob Frost



RUPERT CUTLER

Memories of Dickerman

Assistant Executive Director, The Wilderness Society, 1965-9. Currently, Executive Director, Western Virginia Land Trust.

Long legs striding down a Great Smokies park trail ahead of me, and me trying to keep up, panting. (the guy is 20 years older than I am!) The Great Smoky Mountains Hiking Club rep from Knoxville showing up in the DC office of The Wilderness Society (in his flannel shirt) a few days after the administrative field hearings on Great Smoky Mountains National Park wilderness, offering to work for us for free on

behalf of the Smokies wilderness. (Stu Brandborg eventually put him on salary.) Dickerman the lobbyist, sitting cross-legged at a major corridor intersection in the Rayburn House Office Building with his papers spread out, plotting his next series of congressional office calls (oblivious to the traffic veering round him). Dickerman taking the RARE II inventory for Virginia and running with it, inspiring many others to join him and win the protection of what's left of Wild America in the Old Dominion. There will never be another like him. Peace to his ashes.

LEROY G. FOX

Ernie Dickerman, 1910-1998, A Memorial

Friend and disciple of Ernie Dickerman who, along with Harvey Broome, taught that "Wilderness is where you find it; it must be planned around, not through." Leroy has been Past President (1969-1970), member of the Conservation and the Appalachian Trail Committees for over 30 years, and an activity coordinator for the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club in Knoxville, TN.

Ernie Dickerman's association with the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club (SMHC), based in Knoxville, TN, began about 1936 when Ernie was 25 years old and working for the Tennessee Valley Authority in Chattanooga. Ernie loved the wild places in our land, and the proximity of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) to his livelihood soon drew him to the Park. He disdained trails, and preferred to explore the steep streams and brushy ridges off-trail alone or with companions from the SMHC who were kindred spirits in challenging the virgin wildernesses of the Park. Ernie loved to share his enthusiasms for the wild places; that love and respect for wilderness endures today in Tennessee. We shall share some of Ernie's enthusiastic writings with you.

The 75 year old SMHC has published for most of those years a "Handbook"

which describes the weekly or biweekly hikes scheduled for each upcoming year. The designated leader for each activity writes a brief description of the assigned hike. An excerpt from Ernie's description of a planned March 5, 1939 hike to the summit of the 6,593 foot Mt. LeConte follows.

"You can't improve on Nature, so this time we're going to take Nature's trail - the best kind! - up to the top of Old Smoky. Right smack up all the way to the top by Roaring Fork creek itself. Plenty of fun - and exercise, with boulders to climb over, blowdowns to crawl under, and precipices to scale. When you reach the top of Old LeConte you'll have earned your right to be there. Plenty of snow is expected on the summit."

An April 7, 1940 hike description led by Ernie is similar. "PINNACLE LEAD BY DUNN CREEK - There is no artificial path for most of the distance here, folks. You just clamber up a beautiful creek bed of moss-covered rocks, overflowed by a swift, gleaming mountain stream. Not until you are more than three-fourths of the way up does the water give out. From there on you follow a spruce hollow to the top of Pinnacle Lead, elevation 5,903 feet. From the tree tops you can see the balsam-clad slopes of Old Black and the summit of Mt. Guyot;

Photo by Bill Russell



October 23, 1966. At the Clingman's Dome parking area, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, at the start of the "Save-Our-Smokies-Wilderness Hike", from here via Buckeye Gap and Miry Ridge to Elkmont (17 miles). In the foreground, left to right, Stan Murray (Executive Director, Appalachian Trail Conference), Ernie Dickerman (holding microphone), Harvey Broome and Bob Maher.

to the west Mt. LeConte and the state line; toward the east Maddron Bald and far up the Appalachian Range; and to the north the broad Tennessee Valley. We haven't decided exactly how we will get down from this place, but it won't be by a Grade A trail...." That gives one an idea of Ernie's view of trails.

And another excerpt by this evocative writer; this from the 1942 Handbook follows. "May 30-31 WILDERNESS AREA - Into the heart of the Wilderness Area! Two days of Hiking and camping in the primeval forest of the Great Smoky Mountains! While you are in there, you'll be on your

own; and whatever you take with you, you'll carry in on your own back. The area into which we'll go has not yet been invaded by the rapacious forces of Ickes' (then-Secretary of Interior, Harold Ickes, ed.) minions; there are no roads, no dug trails, no shelters. It is still just like Nature let it grow. Magnificently tall virgin timber; clear streams racing down thru boulder-strewn ravines; forest cover of luxuriant ferns and ankle-deep mosses....."

Ernie became President of the SMHC in 1950 and 1951. In 1950 he created a "Parks Committee" of the SMHC in order to address the Club's possible responses to the trend towards Federal



October 23, 1966. Crowd assembled at Clingman's Dome parking area for "Save-Our-Smokies-Wilderness Hike".

legislation in such areas as Clean Water, Clean Air, Forests, Wilderness, etc. But Ernie hadn't forgotten during the war years his love for wilderness, and wrote as a hike leader for the 1950 Handbook the following excerpt. "July 23, COLE BRANCH TO BALSAM POINT - Come into the cool forest and splash a way up a tumbling mountain stream toward the summit of Balsam Point (actually 6,300 ft. West Point of Mt. LeConte, ed.). Bounded by virgin forest, Cole Branch spills down the long mountainside, in cascade after cascade of brilliant water. The climb is steep and long, but the way is sweet and luscious. You won't be able to hurry and no one will want to. Easy-like, one makes a random way, following the

winding course of the stream. And often - and often - one will stop just to feel more surely the beauty that is all around. It is primeval land, virgin forest, rich green moss, tumbling water, all just as Nature made it - untouched by the scarring, callous forces of man... As and when we have to leave (the summit, ed.), we shall go down through Bear Pen Hollow, again through primeval forest, where only a faint trail shows....."

As his writing illustrates, Ernie not only enjoyed the wild places; he soon realized that many of them were being threatened by the materialistic forces in our society. He felt that loss of wilderness would be an irreparable loss of one of the roots of our country.

Ernie is now remembered for becoming a nationally known activist for wilderness. One of Ernie's maxims was, "Wilderness is where you find it; It must be planned AROUND, not through." That declaration describes Ernie's strategies of not being categorically against progress, but guiding progress so that it doesn't diminish the roots of our society.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 was a result of the work of many persons like Ernie who recognized the value of wilderness to the nation. In January 1965, the SMHC began the preparation of a Wilderness Plan for the GRSM; the plan became public in July, 1965. The GRSM lies in two states; half in TN and half in NC. The SMHC plan called for most of the 525,000 acres of the Park, except for some developed areas and the existing, trans-mountain, Newfound Gap highway, US-441, which connects both states and bisects the Park, to be designated as "wilderness" as defined in the Act. The SMHC's plan was also joined by The Wilderness Society (TWS) of Washington, DC. It was no accident that the two organizations concurred, for the President of TWS was then Harvey Broome, a co-founder of TWS and an active, long-time member of SMHC. In September of that year the National Park Service (NPS) proposed, in its initial plan of the sort for any National Park, six relatively small tracts of wilderness. But a conspicuous, wide corridor was excluded from otherwise qualifying wilderness to

allow for various alignments of a second trans-mountain highway from Swain County, NC into Blount County, TN, which the NPS had tentatively proposed to Swain County officials earlier in 1965.

In accord with the Act, the NPS announced public hearings on its proposal for June, 1966. At the hearings the NPS plan and the SMHC-TWS plans were contrasted in public, with the public sentiment being about 3 to 1 against the NPS proposals. Comments following the hearings, but contained in the record, included over 5,400 letters and statements, with the overwhelming majority favoring the SMHC-TWS plan. The local elected officials had generally supported the NPS plan, so we had to get their attention and raw politics began to be deployed.

During the summer of 1966 the SMHC and TWS gained many friends for their position and plans were made and carried out. A "SAVE OUR SMOKIES WILDERNESS" rally and hike, proposed by Ernie Dickerman, were held on October 23, 1966. The non-violent rally at Clingmans Dome in the GRSM was attended by over 600 persons; most of them walked part of the 17-mile route of the main hike. That route included seldom-visited Buckeye Gap and Miry Ridge which would have been heavily impacted by the proposed second trans-mountain road. A total of 234 persons hiked the entire 17 mile route to show their support for the SMHC-



October 23, 1966. Clingman's Dome parking area. Harvey Broome (holding microphone), Ernie Dickerman to his right (smiling).

TWS-CMC (Carolina Mountain Club) wilderness plan. This demonstration was well covered by local and national media. Attendees of the rally and hike came from 22 states, 8 national organizations, and 260 persons who professed no affiliation. Deployment, with Ernie Dickerman leading, had turned to action.

In February 1967 the CMC made a proposal of a Circle-The-Smokies concept of roads to not only permit enjoyment of Park vistas from outside of the Park, but also to extend the NPS's Blue Ridge Parkway from Cherokee to Fontana, NC without impacting the GRSM. This plan would have provided Swain County, NC with tourist traffic which the County had hoped

for from the second trans-mountain road in the Park; Swain County rejected the CMC plan. On June 5, a Swain County delegation was told by Interior Secretary Stewart Udall that public opposition to the NPS's second trans-mountain road was so strong that Congress would probably not buy it. On December 9, 1967 Secretary Udall announced that the second trans-mountain road would not be included in the NPS wilderness plan.

The controversies continued to fester. In March, 1968 the Tennessee Great Smoky Mountain Park Commission, a State liaison group between TN and GRSM, had an audience with Secretary Udall during which the Commission urged the adoption of the

NPS plans for the GRSM, including a second trans-mountain road. Also in March, 1968 Harvey Broome, President of TWS and SMHC member, died suddenly, leaving Ernie Dickerman as the chief tactician for opposition to the NPS plans. Ernie also began to work as a Field Representative for TWS, but remained active locally. He aided in the early activity of the Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP) an organization founded by Bill and Liane Russell in Oak Ridge, TN to promote wilderness throughout the state, and including the GRSM.

The new Nixon administration named Walter J. Hickel as Secretary of the Interior in 1969. A coalition, inspired by Ernie Dickerman, of wilderness-advocating groups led by the SMHC and TCWP arranged a meeting with Secretary Hickel on June 23, 1969. That meeting resulted in the 92 persons who had traveled to Washington hearing, along with Ernie, from Hickel's lips that the NPS would prepare a new study of all road alternatives in and around the GRSM before any wilderness boundaries would be set. That report was completed and released by the NPS on February 19, 1971. Although the report did not resolve an old Swain County road controversy with the GRSM which still exists, the pertinent recommendations included closure of the existing Newfound Gap road and providing accesses to the interior of the Park from a road system encircling the

Park. The conservation groups realized that closure of the Newfound Gap road would be enormously unpopular, but gave some lip service to the idea until it died quietly. The part of the study which favored an encircling road system was widely endorsed because it omitted further consideration of a second trans-mountain highway, and reopened vast sections of the Park for wilderness designation. Now there might be a place for Ernie to take us hiking in wilderness in the Smokies!

During the 1970's repeated initiatives were made, by regional conservation organizations, allied at Ernie Dickerman's suggestion in the "Great Smokies Park Wilderness Advocates" to work with NPS to resolve mostly local issues in NC. There were disparate citizen groups in NC with selfish concerns for; access to cemeteries if there were "wilderness" areas in the Park, "scenic" roads which couldn't be built for tourists' travel, monuments to local persons, and an alleged overdue payment for a partially flooded and unusable Swain County road incorporated since 1943 within the Park. Possible solutions were proposed and explored in good faith, but unsuccessful in their purpose. However, there was a benefit, for the NPS was working comfortably, but unofficially, at agency level with the Advocates to protect the best of the Park for possible designation as Wilderness.

During the late 1970's the NPS prepared excellent wilderness proposals



BROCK EVANS

Uncle Ernie (on the occasion of Ernest Dickerman's Memorial Service)

Executive Director, Endangered Species Coalition.

He taught me so much of what I know now: about how to lobby, how to be effective in this seething capital city, where for better or worse, so many of the decisions about the fate of our American wilderness are made. It was around 1967, when I had just started my new job as Northwest Representative for the Sierra Club, that I first heard of him and the work that he and his colleagues at the Wilderness Society were doing in Washington.

And whenever my own business - trying to protect the Northwest wilderness - would take me back to the capital, my first stop would always be at the Wilderness Society...and the first person I would see was Ernie. He took me under his wing, and he showed me what it is that an environmental lobbyist needs to know in order to survive in this town: always have your facts straight, always acknowledge the good points of the opposition (before refuting them!), always be courteous, never make any enemies - unless you really intend to, on purpose - and never quit, or give in.

He taught me about the political power of sustained grassroots, 'people'

pressure...in his correct view, we could not hope to establish new wilderness areas in the rural parts of the country (where all of them were located), without finding and encouraging at least a few dedicated local souls to stand up for their special place, and fight for it - in their region, and in the language and terms of that region. That's the way Ernie believed, and that's what he taught me: to have tremendous faith in the people - our own people - and their power to get things done, to rescue this earth. The people themselves are the greatest force for wild places there is. The 15 wilderness areas in the state of Virginia, and their strong network of daily defenders, in the form of the Virginia Wilderness Committee (which Ernie co-founded), is the truest testament to Ernie's faith in and belief in the power of "just folks" to save the places they knew and loved.

Ernie and I lobbied Congress together many times on many issues; but the one that was most personally "his" was the battle to pass the Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975. I was head of the Sierra Club office then, it was my privilege to work with Ernie and walk the halls with him, as we fought that bill through. We "found" suitable areas that qualified in just about every state east of the Mississippi; and then

and incorporated them into the Park's General Management Plan (GMP) of 1981. That GMP calls for almost 90% of the GRSM to be managed as potential wilderness, i.e., until whenever, or if ever, the Congress acts to make a final designation. The unresolved road and other controversies between the NPS and Swain County, NC have become so mired in even National politics that Swain County's irrational road claims are preventing Congressional action on a Park Wilderness. And, sadly, the controversy has outlived our beloved Ernie!

Ernie has received many awards and honors over the years. He was honored additionally in 1986 by the SMHC in presenting him with the Club's "Harvey Broome Distinguished Service Award" in recognition of outstanding long-term contributions to the spirit and objectives of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club.

Ernie Dickerman, "Master of his Fate, and Captain of his Soul" still lives in us as we tread the mossy mountains, the rocky streams, and the forests of his Wildernesses.

A personal note may explain my limited contribution to this Memorial. I joined the SMHC in 1963, and I was soon recruited by Harvey Broome and Ernie Dickerman to become a member of the "Conservation Committee" of the club. That committee activated the strategies and tactics that the club

and its friends could use to promote the need to preserve wilderness wherever it existed. I became President of the SMHC in 1969-70 and was fortunate to have Ernie's help and guidance as I had to endure an uncomfortably high profile to represent the SMHC at national and state levels. I am grateful that I had such an inspiring and enthusiastic teacher. We in the SMHC missed Ernie after he moved to DC and then VA, but he continued to stay in touch with us on wilderness issues in our region.

He remained a friend, and on several visits after I retired in 1975, he made time to go with me to some of his favorite trail-less places, like Wooley Tops. I even took him to a new place for him, the Jump-off on Mt. Kephart via the rocky, mossy Walker Camp Prong.

I have not tried to include Ernie's high level of activities in achieving protection for other wild places in our area. He worked with Ted Snyder of the Sierra Club and Ray Payne of the SMHC in designating the Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness. He worked with Bill and Liane Russell of the TCWP in their achievement of killing a proposed dam and creating in its stead the "Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area" in TN and KY.

it was our task to make sure the area had local support, i.e., local citizens writing their Congressperson in favor of its protection. Ernie and I spent a lot of time on the phone to local activists stimulating those letters; and after a few weeks, we thought we had a pretty good set of great areas, ready to be introduced in a large bill. A number of local Congressmen had told us privately that, while they couldn't actively speak for an area in their district, if it was put into a larger package of many areas, they wouldn't oppose it.

I was with Ernie the day we learned that John Melcher, Chair of the Subcommittee handling the bill, announced that he would not put any area into the final bill unless the affected local Member sent a letter, stating in writing that he was positive for that area. It was the nearest thing to strong language I have ever heard from the normally unflappable, calm, and gentlemanly Ernie. "Goddamn it Brock - some of these Congressmen are just too stupid to know that wilderness is good for their districts", he drawled out. Then we went back to work, and still were able to salvage most of the areas; and the Act passed.

Ernie's two greatest passions in life were the Great Smoky Mountain National Park and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and he did much to protect them; but I have always thought that the Eastern Wilderness Act was his greatest achievement. And

his truest monuments are those lovely little places, like Ramsey's Draft, which was one of his first Virginia wilderness victories, and (I think) his first love (mine too)...or the St. Mary's Wilderness, where he took me and Linda and our dog Maggie in 1987, when I had just turned 50 and we went over to see Ernie for consolation. "I've got an idea Brock...let's celebrate this auspicious occasion (I can still hear his Tennessee accent as he enunciated the words) and go for a walk through the St. Mary's Wilderness...we just protected it, and I'll show you around..."

Well, it turned out to be a typical 'Ernie walk' - that is, a 10-mile Death March, most of it off the trail, hand over hand through the laurel hells, and lots of steep sidehilling, with 76-year old Ernie far in front, way ahead of us in his tank-top T shirt and the beat up straw hat that he always wore out in the woods.

Every Memorial Day weekend for many years in the 1970's and 1980's, our whole family would pack up and head out to the Ramsey's Draft Wilderness, about 20 miles away from Ernie's retirement farm at Buffalo Gap. We would hike into the Wilderness, camp out for two days and nights deep in the forest down by the lovely creek, then on Sunday, drive across the mountain to Ernie's place. He would hear us coming up the long steep driveway...I can still see him ambling out to meet us. Then an evening of drinks on his porch, fol-

lowed by a typical 'Ernie Feast' of roast beef, or pork chops, all sitting around the plain table in his plain country kitchen...I still see the plastic placemats with their country scenes on them, and I still visualize the books about Iceland on the shelves, from his nephew Bob's tour of duty there as a Foreign Service officer.

Then a deep sleep, a big 'Ernie Breakfast' of eggs and bacon and toast, followed by a walk through the forest up the mountain. At the end of the walk, he would always take us to his prized and secret place where the ladyslippers grew...then off we would go.

My sons called him Uncle Ernie. I don't think they knew he had any other name.

Ernie would return the visit, six months later...every Thanksgiving right up through last year's - 1997 - he would make the 180-mile drive to our house. He would always arrive on Thanksgiving Day, around 1 pm, as we were preparing the feast...we would all eat together and there was always lots of good talk - because we, loving lots of companions on such occasions, would invite an eclectic mix of family, old friends, and new ones - people with nowhere else to go - 'strays' we called them, foreign visitors often, from places like Italy or Slovakia...then afterwards, after we had all rested off the effects of too much good food - Ernie would pull out the scrabble board. He always won, because he not

only had a photographic memory, but he brought along lots of dictionaries - even a Scottish dictionary once. "They're part of the English language heritage too", he would say. My wife Linda was the only person who could beat him, usually winning (narrowly) about one game out of five.

We loved him, Uncle Ernie. And after he left to go back - always on Saturday morning, around 10, after his favorite breakfast of Linda's cranberry bread and french toast - we could expect, promptly, a thank you note or, more often, a letter. Written in the kind of elegant and gentlemanly prose that one rarely sees these hurried times, Ernie would find something nice to say about everyone there. His recall of the events of the weekend was amazing, and always exact. I have a treasure-chest of Ernie's letters.

Of all the wonderful anecdotes stretching over my 30 years with him, my favorite 'Ernie story' is about the time I introduced him to Hazel Wolf, about 1987. Hazel, a very well-known and vigorous environmental activist from Seattle, was almost 90 years old then. She had arrived in town after 5 days riding the Freedom Train across the country to lobby Congress on a variety of "progressive" issues. Hazel by the way was the epitome of a "flaming liberal", and probably as much to the left of every issue as Ernie, a social conservative, was to the right. (Environmental issues excepted, of course.)

Ernie was staying with us for a few days in order to lobby Congress against a road into the Smokies wilderness. Linda was out of town, but had left me - a non-cook - a pot of homemade chili to serve. I was just stirring it up when the phone rang. "Brock, this is Hazel...just got here on the Freedom Train and the hotel doesn't have a room..can I stay at your house?" Of course, so I put the chili on the back burner, drove down to pick her up, and an hour later, walked back in the door. "Hazel, Ms. Famous Environmentalist from the West Coast, meet Ernie, Mr. Famous Environmentalist from the East Coast", I said - probably in words not exactly like that.

Naturally, I assumed that these two oldsters - one 76, the other about 90 - each coming a long distance to fight for what they believed in, would have a lot in common and would soon be engaged in an animated conversation. But it was not quite to be that way... after a few pleasantries, I heard Ernie say - "these old people, you know...they use up too many resources...they just waste everyone's time, and are a burden on society... they take and take and don't give anything back...they ought to be put away!..."

Hazel - who the Eisenhower Administration tried to have deported back to her native Canada because she had belonged to the Communist Party in the 1930's - shot right back: "What do you mean? These old people have

paid their dues already...they can do whatever they like...they should be allowed to play pinochle if they want to!"

And so the verbal struggle raged back and forth...it was an animated conversation all right, but not quite the idyllic and reflective sort that I had expected from these two passionate and committed 'old people'. Of course, it never occurred to either the 76-year old or the 90-year old that they themselves had any affinity whatsoever with those unknown "old people" whose right to exist and contributions to society they were so passionately arguing.

After Ernie returned home, within a few days came another 'Ernie thank-you note'. In this one Ernie acknowledged his meeting with Hazel, and in his always courteous and generous way said "well I have to agree, after talking to Hazel, that maybe she's right: old people should not be 'put away'--they should just agree to go voluntarily!"

For years, that was a funny story, which I have often told to others to help them share and understand some of Ernie's passion, his commitment to the earth, and his total seeming unawareness of any age limits on his own self at all--for he certainly seemed immortal to *us* in those years.

It is still a great story: a testament to the fact that chronological age is never a barrier to persons who are dedicated to a cause, and live their lives accord-

ingly. He was always Ernie - Forever and Always-There Ernie - to me, my family, my colleagues.

But now I see that there was a warning in it too, and a revelation into the soul of this unique man. It was of no matter what we, his friends, may have thought about his condition; after all, we only knew that wonderful mind and sense of humor, we were the ones who always recalled his constant phrase, "let's have fun while we do this."

That's what Ernie actually *was* to us. But inside himself, where none of us could go, other thoughts were being processed: if he felt that he was 'not able to give' anymore, then perhaps the time had come to follow his own strictures to Hazel, spoken so long ago.

Oh--it pains me deep inside to think this. He will always be Uncle Ernie... Indestructible Ernie, to me.



LIANE RUSSELL

How we'll miss Ernie Dickerman

Founder, Board member and past President of the Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP) and editor of the TCWP newsletter. Both she and her husband Bill were close friends of Ernie's since 1966, when they first met him in connection with the Smokies Wilderness hearings, and worked with him on this and numerous other issues in subsequent years.

Ernie was a giant in the conservation world long before TCWP was even born. But he was right in with us from our formation in 1966 onward and served on the very first TCWP Board (as well as on the 1970 Board). He was TCWP's Vice President in 1968 and 1969, during

the period of our big fight against the proposed new transmountain road across the Smokies. He, more than anyone, could take credit for defeat of that road. Among other things, he arranged the well-publicized cross-the-Smokies hike (along the route of the proposed highway); and in 1969, he organized our huge trip to Washington (2 full busloads!) during which we met with then Interior Secretary Walter Hickel and got him turned around.

A little while thereafter, Ernie moved to Washington to work for the Wilderness Society; and in 1976 he went to live at a simple cabin on his nephew's land in the mountains of Buffalo Gap, VA. But, of course, he

never retired, contributing major, successful service to the huge task of saving 15 wildernesses in Virginia's national forests. Throughout his life, Ernie's greatest gift was inspiring others (including so many TCWP members) to save wilderness throughout the country.

At the end of July, Ernie wrote a note to family and friends on his 1945 typewriter (on which he typed his

annual Christmas letters to us) to say that he "died at the age of 87 by his own hand as had long planned.... 'Quit while you are ahead' is sound philosophy, both in poker and in life." If he couldn't care for himself in the wilderness, life for him wasn't worth living.

Reprinted from TCWP Newsletter #224, 7 October 1998.



RAY PAYNE

Ernie Dickerman – Wilderness Advocate Unsurpassed

Mechanical Engineer, Wilderness Advocate.

Having joined the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club in 1964 I began off-trail hiking in the Smokies and of course began to meet those members of the club who relished this kind of hiking. One of my early experiences on one of these hikes led to me getting to know Ernie and his love for the wilderness of the Smokies.

On a warm June day during my early years with the club, Ernie led a hike for the club in the Greenbrier area of the Smokies. This is one of the more rugged areas of the Smokies where

large scale commercial logging had not occurred and few trails exist. This hike was up Cannon Creek, across the ridge between it and Lowes Creek at relatively high elevation and then down Lowes Creek. In the description of the hike Ernie described this ridge crossing as being through "open woods" and the routes up and down the two creeks were of little concern. For Ernie this was quite true.

Several in the group, who clearly didn't know Ernie and who shouldn't have been on this particular outing, and who spent an unplanned night in the Smokies on Lowes Creek, gained a new appreciation for "open woods" and no-problem creeks from Ernie's view-

point. Rhododendron that clad hillsides and choked the creeks that were filled with slick rocks, and the dog hobble, witch hobble, blowdowns and assorted undergrowth that covered the ridges was of little concern to Ernie. He loved it. This was real wilderness.

Ernie's dedication to the preservation of the Smokies wilderness and his total dedication to stopping the construction of a highway from Bryson City, NC, to Townsend, TN, through the wilderness of the Smokies is very well documented in this tribute by Leroy Fox.

In 1969 while devoting untold hours of his time to stopping the road across the Smokies, Ernie (working on behalf of The Wilderness Society) joined in the battle to save what later came to be named the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Area. This area is primarily in NC but spills over into Tennessee. First the logging road that was being built by the US Forest Service into the Slickrock Creek watershed for logging purposes and their logging plans had to be put on hold; and the construction of the highway from Robbinsville, NC, to Tellico Plains, TN, through the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest had to be stopped. This was accomplished with help from the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, Trout Unlimited in NC and the Sierra Club.

At first we concentrated on legislation to protect the Kilmer-Slickrock area under provisions of the 1964 Wilderness Act. But many other areas in our eastern national forests also

qualified for protection under this act. With Ernie at the forefront, legislation for an Eastern Wilderness Areas Act which included the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Area was prepared and passed with only a few days left on the calendar of the 93rd Congress at the end of 1974. Eastern national forest areas from New England to Georgia were now protected as designated wilderness areas.

This legislation was signed into law in early January, 1975 culminating six years of effort which since then has led to the designation of other wilderness areas in the eastern national forests. Among these, adjacent to the Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, is the Citico Wilderness Area, which was designated as a wilderness study area by the original EWAA.

Many of us here in the east contributed thousands of hours to this effort but throughout the period of time from 1965 when I first got to know Ernie, his love for wilderness, determination, tenacity and persuasiveness led the way.

Since his retirement from The Wilderness Society until his death Ernie lived on a small mountain farm near Buffalo Gap, VA, west of Staunton. He concentrated his wilderness efforts on saving special areas in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests and of course counseling those of us who struggled on in Tennessee and other states in the east.



THEODORE A. SNYDER, JR.

former President, The Sierra Club

I first met Ernie about 1969 or 1970 when the Carolinas group of the Sierra Club had just started work on the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River campaign. He called me about 3:00 pm and asked if he could come up. I told him to come on, and in a few minutes he appeared at my office in Greenville, SC. For the next three hours we sat facing each other and engaged in a non-stop review, assessment and strategizing session about the Chattooga. There was an instant cementing of a friendship that lasted until Ernie's death.

Ernie telephoned me frequently from Washington as we shepherded the Chattooga Bill through Congress.

Then, eastern wilderness came into our sights. Ernie came down to Asheville and helped us organize the Joyce Kilmer Wilderness Advocates. Ernie and I were in constant contact as I took on a larger role, along with Allen Smith and Roger Marshall in guiding the Sierra Club effort.

Ray Payne, Leroy Fox and I inherited Ernie's Great Smoky Mountains Wilderness campaign. For 25 years or more Ernie and I kept up a constant correspondence and telephone communication about the Smokies. In his

last letter dated 26 February 1998 he suggested that I should consider taking a disguise and running for Swain County Commissioner.

When Ernie was living in Washington, his apartment was always open to visiting firemen. I stayed there several times, sleeping on his couch, and using his sleeping bag. On the coldest nights, at bedtime, Ernie always cut the heat off and opened his windows wide.

After he retired to Buffalo Gap, I visited him there, always for his help and advice on wilderness projects. One time he met me at Rockfish Gap, and we bushwhacked up to a convenient meadow and spent the afternoon drafting a wilderness bill.

Ernie proselytized me into the Wilderness movement, and was my mentor. He taught me the ropes of Washington lobbying. He taught me how to draft legislation. He taught me how to make effective public testimony. Ernie was ever willing to help teach at wilderness workshops, and to give cheering talks. When you consider that the help and encouragement he gave me must also have been extended to a thousand others, the scope of his contribution to Wilderness becomes

truly grand. The influence he had on us is one monument to him, but it is a spiritual thing.

A greater monument to Ernie would be the designation of an Ernest M. Dickerman Wilderness. I propose that

we agree now to designate all the Wilderness in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park as the Ernest M. Dickerman Wilderness.



MICHAEL FROME

Author, educator, conservationist, recalls here his connection with Ernie and Ernie's great friend, Harvey Broome, in the Save-the-Smokies campaign. Michael's books include Battle for the Wilderness, Strangers in High Places, and his latest, Green Ink - An Introduction to Environmental Journalism (January 1999).

The first time I met Ernie was in 1964 while researching my book about the Great Smoky Mountains. I was sitting in a restaurant on the main street of Gatlinburg, Tennessee, drinking coffee with the park superintendent, Fred Overly, when Ernie walked in with a hiking buddy, Herrick Brown, just off the trail from Mt. LeConte. Ernie was friendly enough, but I felt he was looking me over rather skeptically, probably wondering about my qualifi-

cations to write a respectable, responsible work about the mountain wilderness that he knew intimately and had championed for years.

Neither he nor I had the foggiest notion at the time that we soon would work together in an uphill campaign to protect the Smokies from their designated protectors of the National Park Service and go on from there as allies and friends in the unending battle for the wilderness. But within a few months of that first meeting the Park Service announced its wilderness proposal for the Great Smokies and it couldn't have been worse. It was, in fact, an anti-wilderness proposal. As the New York Times editorialized June 14, 1966, on the eve of public hearings:

"The Park Service has come up with a



Ernie and Michael Frome together in Bellingham, Washington, September 13-14, 1989.

meager, unsatisfactory and essentially bureaucratic proposal that six different areas covering less than half the park be held inviolate as wilderness. It is the Park Service, supposedly the prime protector, that has plans to destroy major parts of the Smokies wilderness by constructing several highways. Another 100,000 acres could be saved and the whole wilderness grouped into two homogenous units if the Park Service's roadbuilding mania were modified."

Ernie played a very large role in generating public awareness and concern that led to media attention across the country to the crisis in the Smokies. He certainly was not alone, however; I think of Ernie then and thereafter in collaboration and kinship with two others, Harvey Broome and Stewart

Brandborg. All three of them are special heroes of mine.

Harvey and Ernie gave the spark that fueled the fight to block the evil bureaucratic design to destroy the Smokies' wilderness. They were old Knoxville buddies, long active in the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club. Harvey for all his modesty was a heroic figure, one of the founders of the Wilderness Society, along the Robert Marshall, Benton MacKaye and a handful of others, and was president of the Society in the sixties, when he was most needed. Out Under the Sky of the Great Smokies, Harvey's lively journal, includes references to many trips he and Ernie made together. These range from early 1941, when they hiked to Woolly Tops, plunging into "the dead of winter, with great

snow blankets, gray-green ice falls, and rime-covered trees," to the historic Save-Our-Smokies hike on Sunday, October 23, 1966. On that day a total of 576 people walked some portion of the route from the Clingmans Dome parking area out along the Appalachian Trail to Buckeye Gap, where the proposed road was intended to cross the crest of the Smokies, and then down to the Elkmont Campground. A total of 234 persons walked the entire 17 miles, the last completing the trip by moonlight.

It took everything the citizens could do to counter the attack on the Smokies wilderness by George B. Hartzog, Jr., the crafty director of the National Park Service. Fortunately, the local troops in North Carolina and Tennessee benefited from the unstinting support of Stewart Brandborg, then the executive director of the Wilderness Society. He was instrumental in making the fate of the Smokies a national issue. And it was logical that Ernie in time would join "Brandy" on the staff of the Society in Washington and ultimately would leave when Brandy left.

"It is amazing how many persons from all over the country supported wilderness designation in the Great Smoky Mountains," Dickerman wrote to me in retrospective thirty years later, "and opposed any new roads in the course of the campaign" - which lasted six

years from 1965 until 1971 - when George Hartzog finally threw in the towel.

"Frankly, the Park Service, except perhaps during its earliest years, has commonly been out of touch with the owners of the national parks in its basic policies and practices. The Park Service, instead of working closely with the citizens knowledgeable about national parks and devoted to protecting their extraordinary natural values, has considered them as antagonists."

Ernie was a fine, insightful writer, among his other talents, but I think his strongest suit is embodied in a saying I got from another Tennessee friend, Mack Prichard: "There is no limit to what you can accomplish as long as you don't care who gets the credit." And that is how Ernie could accomplish all that he did. Too bad they don't much make them like him any more, but we do have his legacy of faith and hope, commitment to principle larger than self.

"It is amazing how political democracy in the United States, despite its deficiencies and innumerable errors," he once wrote to me, "permits so many of us to lead satisfying, rewarding lives." Thanks, Ernie, for showing us how to do it.



SYLVIA A. BRUGH

Friend, walked with him in the wilderness, attended Forest Service meetings and water quality meetings with him.

Every time I was with Ernie, I just tried to get real close because I *knew* a new learning experience or a fresh insight was at hand! Each idea and gleam of wisdom to be succinctly expressed - not a wasted word - not a wasted moment! He had the gift of making profound truths simple. Ernie, with his wise and patient teaching, brought me to a new level of environmental consciousness and encouraged me to, in my own small way, make a difference (with "brown paper bag" letters to legislators..) for the protection of special places.

His joy in the well-wrought handiwork of creation was contagious. What a privilege it was to share in that joy with him and to perceive the intensity of his devotion! His whole life commemorated the majestic heights and intriguing depths (Rich Hole, bogs of Laurel Fork and Beartown...) of our natural world.

Ernie was of immense help to me during the fight to achieve Scenic River Designation for the Upper James and in the beginning years of our Advisory Board. He wanted to see that section

of the river first-hand! So I have very special memories of a May day float from Gwynn Dam down to Narrow Passage - just Ernie and I. Ernie's patience and strength were enormously taxed that day! We met at Buchanan but I had failed to tell him that we would first drive up Route 43, then 688, and put in at Gwynn Dam. In Buchanan Ernie was all set to go when I got there, canoe at water's edge! I wasn't much help in getting it up and lashed to the rack again. By the time the canoe arrived at "water's edge" the second time that morning, Ernie was getting a little weary!

Now in all fairness to Ernie, I must tell you that I am a rather small person, not very strong, not handy with paddles or anything requiring dexterity, and in stressful situations, can't remember right from left! Everything went smoothly the first few miles, no problems, wonderful scenery, calm water. *Then* we got to Salisbury. Here, an impressive abutment of a towpath bridge (unfinished remnant of the James River and Kanawha Canal) stands on one of two islands at the mouth of Catawba Creek. Extremely difficult negotiating here but I, blissfully ignorant of just *how* difficult, insisted we *had* to "see the towpath bridge". Unfortunately I wasn't much help paddling and, despite Ernie's best

efforts - Herculean efforts - his faithful friend, forty-year-old wood canoe was put in wretched jeopardy! So were we. He persisted and won! Admirable self-control in adversity! This was the same spot where, several years later, I commanded the captain of a bateau to "get over to the right, we *must* see the towpath bridge!" The outcome of that venture was the smashing up of the bateau on the rocks and fifteen stranded passengers.

If Ernie has told you this story, you will now know that 'twas I who was the culprit. This is a confessional! But Ernie was gallant to the end, never an unkind word! Almost super-human self-discipline! Lunch at the foot of the towpath bridge "you must see" was

tranquil but very quiet. The next morning, newly invigorated after a good night's sleep, Ernie came into the kitchen to the aroma of Mother's baking powder biscuits, rhubarb-strawberry "conserve", and so on. Rejuvenated, returned enthusiasm! I will always have the image of him, standing tall, squaring his shoulders, and uttering a soulful "HOT DOG!!" Ready for a new day! More challenges! Fresh courage! What a man!

Ernie Dickerman: Educator in the wild! Indomitable spirit! True gentleman! Integrity personified! Always when I am in beautiful places, I will think of Ernie and stand a little taller just because *I knew him!* Somehow I believe he will not be far away.



BESS MURRAY

reprinted from the Virginia Wilderness Committee newsletter, August 1998

Vice-President, Virginia Wilderness Committee.

Sad news travels fast, so by Monday, August 3, most of us had heard that Ernie Dickerman had died the previous Friday night. The news left a huge hole in so many places. Some of us just became very quiet, some of us talked to each other at length on the telephone, some start-

ed writing rapidly about all that Ernie had meant to the conservation community. Selfishly, perhaps, I started thinking of all that Ernie had meant to my own family. My husband Jim said, as usual briefly but poignantly "We'll miss him".

I was only dimly aware of Jim's association with Ernie in 1969 - at the formation of the VWC, 5 years after the



passage of the Wilderness Act. I was immersed in the domesticities of a young family, and slightly resented Jim's frequent absences "doing something about Wilderness with Ernie". I may even have said that Jim seemed to fall in with anything Ernie suggested, and Jim may well have said yes. What Ernie suggested usually needed doing, and was right, reasonable, timely and wise. A few years later, when the children and I went on wilderness hikes with them, I remember saying "Why didn't you TELL me all this was out here?", and Jim saying "We have been--for years". Disjointed vignettes in no particular order, come to mind as I think about the relationship Ernie, childless and a lifelong bachelor, had with our children.

In 1979 we led a group of reporters and photographers up the St Marys River to generate favorable publicity for Wilderness designation. Our second son was by far the youngest person on the trip and nobody waited to see if he needed help on the stream crossings--except Ernie--which was the beginning of THEIR friendship. When our first son was old enough to be turned loose in Washington DC for an afternoon, and we asked him where he'd been, he muttered "slipped a note under Congressman Olin's door about wilderness", and glowed when we said "Ernie'll like that". And from our daughter "Ernie is so clearly one of the few people in the world my father really likes and respects".

The whole family was pleased when he came, he was such a WHOLE person.

He may have come to "talk Wilderness with Father", most probably did, but he joined in talking to everyone about what was on their minds. Once it was some unbelievably amateurish theatricals, and Ernie cheerfully held up one end of the blanket/curtain and flatteringly christened the outfit "The Banks of the Rivanna Theater" which delighted the children.

His brown bag lunches on hikes were always frugal and modest, in keeping with the rest of his lifestyle, yet he enjoyed good food and wine, loved to sit down to an ample, home-cooked meal, and always ate like a teenager. At the annual VWC meeting at our house this June, I was secretly pleased when he confessed he'd forgotten his lunch, because I loved feeding him and he was so appreciative.

Yes, a whole person, who wrote beautifully and read widely, and not just about wilderness. The same daughter has just finished a Ph.D in French Civilization, and on one of Ernie's recent visits, he asked her, with his usual interest, about her studies. "I couldn't believe how well-read he is in MY subject" she said "from Proust on up and down. Most people just go blank when I start talking about it."

There's absolutely no secret about what we can do for Ernie now. Our current Wilderness Areas are his legacies, and his memorial must be the future ones. Ernie wouldn't want us to mourn him, but in this family, we all must a bit. As Jim says: "We'll miss him."

WILL SKELTON

Memories of Ernie Dickerman

Knoxville attorney, an organizer and chair of the Cherokee National Forest Wilderness Coalition which led the Tennessee wilderness effort in the 1970's-1980's, and editor of Wilderness Trails of Tennessee's Cherokee National Forest published by the UT Press.

Ernie Dickerman's name has now passed into the history of American wilderness preservation efforts, and he will be remembered as one who made a tremendous difference for our wild lands, especially in the eastern United States.

My first personal recollection of Ernie is in connection with the passage of the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act in 1974. Some background: The Forest Service had, until then, maintained that no areas in the east really qualified for wilderness designation under the 1964 Wilderness Act. The EWAA, which combined wilderness areas from several eastern states into an omnibus bill, changed that Forest Service attitude.

I was involved in the passage of the EWAA primarily regarding our Tennessee areas, and was concerned, with lots of other people, that the bill had not been adopted as the Congressional session drew toward closing. Then we got the good news

that the bill passed, literally in the very last hours of the 93rd Congress. Only later did I learn that Ernie Dickerman, working for The Wilderness Society, was the person most responsible for finally convincing the politicians to pass the bill.

Our paths occasionally crossed in the ensuing years as we both continued to work on wilderness protection issues, both nationally and locally. In person, I remember Ernie as an unrelentingly positive and cheerful person, always pro-wilderness and sure we were going to win. His unique cadence-like voice and lively and sparkling eyes made a personal impression that you could almost see and hear in his correspondence and writings. Indeed, because he was in Washington DC or, after retirement from The Wilderness Society, Virginia, I saw little of him personally, but through letters and Christmas cards we maintained contact.

I envied Ernie a bit, living out his retirement years in a mountain cabin in the Blue Ridge Mountains, specifically in Buffalo Gap, Virginia, and going forth to fight for Virginia wilderness. And I looked forward to his Christmas cards and the accompanying typed letter with handwritten notes. He often started the letters with a seasonal thanks for something

in the political/environmental arena; for example, in 1994: "The finest gift of 1992 has been the elimination of George Bush from the White House and replacement by Clinton and Gore. It has been a long, sad 12 years." Even back then he commented; "Old age is finally catching up with me... But it is still great to live among the mountains and with ever affectionate felines Angel and Kumquat."

Ernie's last Christmas letter in 1997 portended the future in at least two respects. He was even then disillusioned by President Clinton's personal

morality and wondered: "It is amazing and at the same time encouraging how a politically free nation like ours can prosper despite incompetent, even crooked political leadership!" And regarding his physical condition he commented: "My general condition and health continues to be good, tho inevitably at 88 years energy steadily lessens." But always the optimist, he ended with information about the wilderness issues he was still working on and the comment that "East Tennessee is a great place in which to live as you do!"



ED ZAHNISER

Youngest child of Howard and Alice Zahniser. His father was the primary author of the 1964 Wilderness Act. Ed worked on the staff of the Wilderness Society with Ernie Dickerman in the 1970s. For the past 20 years he has worked for the Division of Publications of the National Park Service at Harpers Ferry Center in West Virginia.

When I worked at the Wilderness Society in the early 1970s, fat neckties were coming on strong. One day Ernie

Dickerman showed up at work with a flashy fat tie, bronze-colored with large, print accents. "Ernie," I said, "I'd be impressed by how up-to-date you are on fashion if I didn't remember that you wore that same tie to our house for dinner once in the 1950s!" Ernie was still a regional hero in the 1950s, pre-retirement, the kind of stalwart who pumped up my father Howard Zahniser's soul by remote in the urban wilderness of the Nation's Capital.

Ernie wasn't impressed with fashion. Ernie wasn't even impressed with having to eat three times a day. As we were driving back from a Wilderness Society annual council meeting in the Adirondacks, Ernie was asleep in the back seat of the car across from Doug Scott. Sleeping was Ernie's way of making good use - as a conservation lobbyist - of down time such as road travel. Stanley James was driving, and his stomach unilaterally voted "Stop".

"Ernesto" - I think Harry Crandall named Ernie that - Doug said, nudging him, "we're stopping for lunch." Ernie looked around, slowly coming to, and said "Millions of years of evolution - you'd think human beings could come up with a way to not have to eat three times a day." Dickerman's drawled southernisms disarmed hardened thugs, even in the halls of Congress.

Ernie embodied no-nonsense commitment with a sense of humor. His spirit was infectious to all ages. Without people like Ernie dogging it, democracy would be a flat-out goner. He fought for a minority interest, wilderness preservation, for decades. He gave the wild margins a voice against the building shopping-mall Hell of desires obtained. Any wilderness east of the Mississippi River knows Ernie Dickerman's name, even New York State's Adirondack wilderness, whose "forever wild" predated Ernie by a couple decades.

The next time some kid asks you what he or she should be when they grow up, tell them you don't know *what* they should be, but you do know who they might should try to be like. It'd do America good.