

Be Careful what you Pray For – By Joseph Hearst

Early last October I was traveling in northern Arizona and southern Utah with my friend Dan. We hiked in the Paria Wilderness, photographing the fascinating rock formations in the Coyote Buttes area, and then in the Grand Staircase – Escalante National Monument. We had beautiful light, and made many splendid images. But Dan was not satisfied. He complained that our grand vistas weren't very interesting, because there were no clouds in them, and asked me if I could do anything about it.

I just expressed sympathy the first couple of times he talked about the problem, but the third time, at a motel in Escalante, I decided to try to do something about it. I had brought some nice Merlot along (decent wine is hard to find in small Utah towns), and I told Dan about the ancient custom of libation. Nowadays the term is used by proprietors of drinking establishments to describe their wares, but originally it meant the pouring of wine onto the ground as an offering to the gods. I took Dan, and our glasses of Merlot, outside in back of the motel, and we each poured a small amount onto the bare ground, while I invoked Zeus and requested some clouds.

In the morning some small clouds duly appeared, and by evening they were thickening. We spent the day in the Escalante area, and decided that the next day we would head home to California, spending the first night at Bryce Canyon, and then instead of going south through Bakersfield we would go up the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada and photograph fall colors there.

Bryce Canyon was delightful, and the sunset clouds were perfect for photography. We got more great clouds for sunrise. Then we started out towards Cedar City, and took highway 20, which crosses a pass at 9900 ft. It began to rain.



By the time we got to the pass, we had mixed snow and hail! We made it across the pass with some difficulty, and went on through Las Vegas to Barstow, where we spent the night.

We listened to the weather forecast on the radio: heavy snow was predicted for the route we planned to take up the eastern slope of the Sierra and over Donner Pass. The forecast was worse for the morning, so we gave up on that part of the trip and went over Tehachapi Pass at 3800 ft., in light snow. At the same time some of our friends were taking a field trip in the eastern Sierra area, and made lovely snow pictures, but had to go hundreds of miles out of their way to get home, because Donner Pass was closed.

We got home with no further problems, but since then all of Southern California has had plenty of rain, and at present it is the third wettest year in history, with floods, mudslides, and collapsed roads and bridges. Arizona has experienced severe flooding as well. Evidently the old Cloud-Gatherer hadn't had good wine in a very long time, and really showed his appreciation.