

Words That Work

Dispatches from a lost world

He becomes a prisoner of love—of the canyons, of the side streams, of the river whose mood, weight, speed and density he measures. Meet-understand-empathize-respect-trust-love.

Isn't there a weak link in this chain?

Can ever a love be trusted?

—Katie Lee, *The Ghosts of Dandy Crossing*

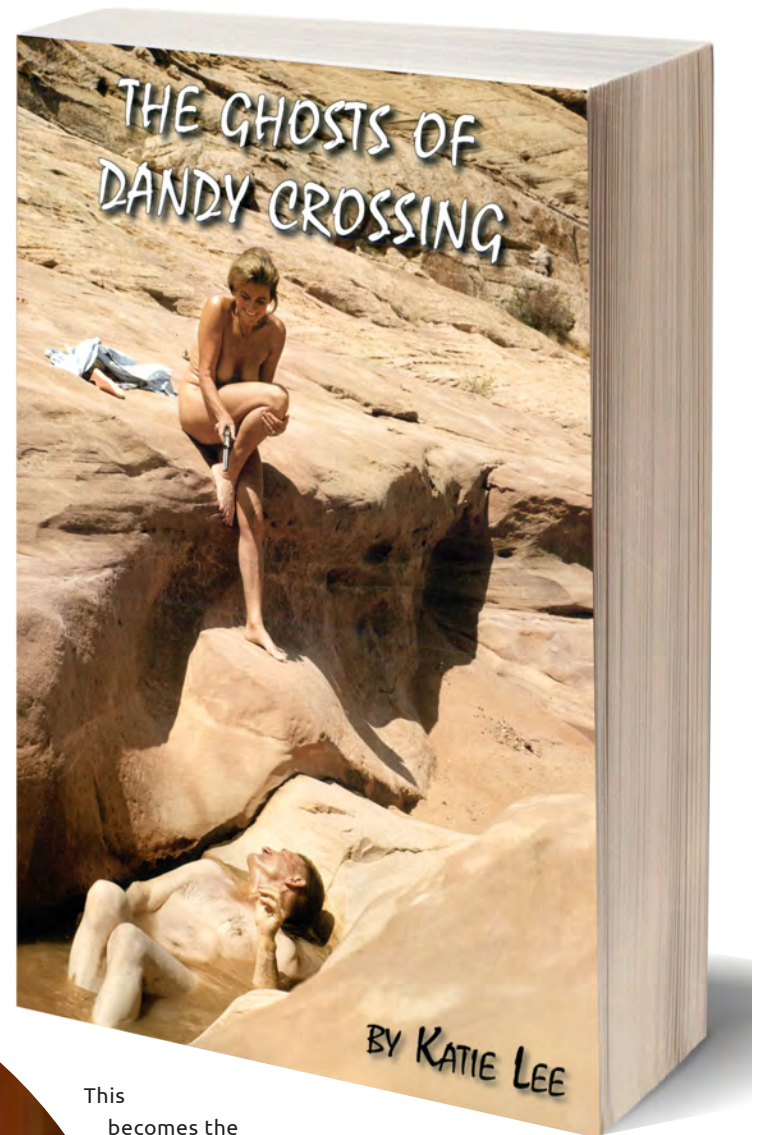
In her new book, *The Ghosts of Dandy Crossing*, author Katie Lee poses these questions knowing full well the hard answers. Perpetually heartbroken from a love gone sour, namely the Colorado River's drowning beneath the reservoir that Glen Canyon Dam created in 1963, Lee pours out her anger, sadness and love in this tale of loss.

Lee's fictional work draws upon her experiences not only as a passionate explorer of Glen Canyon, but also her career as a professional folk singer. Those familiar with Lee's story as an early river runner know of her many trips through Glen Canyon before the dam was built. *Ghosts* instead focuses on the 20 years following the completion of Glen Canyon Dam, from 1962 to 1981.

Lee, whose name is Shan in the book, begins the tale at the onset of her last river trip down the Glen. The location of Hite Marina (currently closed due to low water levels in drought-starved Powell Reservoir) was once called Dandy Crossing, where a ferry existed to take people back and forth across the Colorado.



Author, folksinger, photographer, wilderness activist and adventurer, Katie Lee. Courtesy Photo



This becomes the physiographic crux of the story, where a cast of characters must contend with the approaching reservoir and its effects on their lives.

It's notable that there are few passages here that exalt Glen Canyon's marvels, as in Lee's previous books. In *Ghosts* she is more interested in exploring the aftermath of seeing those wonders submerged. The challenges extend not only to accepting the disappearance of her great love, but also the effects this had upon her tight friendships which formed as a result of running the river. When the dam begins to halt the river's flow, the changes come fast and hard.

Although Lee details an honest-to-goodness

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romantic affair with a man, it's Shan's unique friendship with two men named Jason and Step that best illustrates how a changed landscape can disrupt emotional bonds. These two characters were drawn from Lee's real-life adventures with boatman Frank Wright and photographer Tad Nichols, with whom she took many river trips through Glen Canyon.

through Glen Canyon, and realize that certain of their yearnings will never come to pass.

At 95 years old, Lee has produced a very personal book that brings to life the historic damming of the Colorado, an event that rewarded Lee's short-lived ecstasy with life-long tragedy. It won't be very long until those lucky few who ran a free-flowing Glen Canyon will all be gone. As someone who has skirted the edges of Glen Canyon, and explored many of its remaining side canyons that exist above



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These trips were detailed in the excellent book, *Glen Canyon: Images of a Lost World*, which featured Nichols' black and white photography of the pre-dam canyon. Both Lee and Wright offered their experiences in that book, which gave me an understanding of how two men and a woman happened to form a bond not based on sex or romance, but rather on a mutual appreciation for the heart of the Colorado Plateau.

In *Ghosts*, Lee goes deeper to give us a behind-the-scenes account of three river rats who love each other, but perhaps not as much as they love this landscape. Lee uses colloquial-speak to illustrate the backwoods flavor of their banter, and the dialogue shows us how much fun they had as a trio. However, the undercurrent of grief is close to the surface as they complete their last voyage

the reservoir, I've spent hours wondering about what lay beneath the surface of that water.

There are several books that reveal Glen Canyon's magic, but Lee's *Ghosts* fills the literary gap that has existed between the dam's construction and the modern era. She offers a first-hand look at the agonizing creep of the reservoir as it gradually drowns one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. Her unique perspective offers us an indispensable reminder both of what was, and what eventually must return. 📖

Elias Butler is a writer, photographer and desert rat. His favorite trips to Glen Canyon include hiking West and 50-Mile Canyons with family and friends. More of his work can be seen at www.eliasbutler.com.

BALLOT BOUND

Voters will decide the fate of two tax increases this November aimed at alleviating city and county road woes.



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