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Chris Garber: A Tribute — by Mark Ritchie

On January 21, 1996 our friend, Chris S. Garber, 33, lost his life doing one of the things he loved, skiing the back country. While telemarking on Centennial Ridge in the Snowy Range he was caught up in an avalanche.

Born March 15, 1962 to the concrete and asphalt confines of Philadelphia, Chris found his way to Wyoming in 1990. From then until 1995 he worked as the Heritage Zoologist for the Nature Conservancy's Wyoming Natural Diversity Database here in Laramie. During that time he walked the mountains and plains of Wyoming looking for rare species; surveying such critters as the Wyoming toad, the boreal toad, and the Townsend big-eared bat. As Chris's work contributed to the cause of conservation, he was helping to ensure Wyoming's natural legacy. At the same time it fed his own love of the outdoors. It was no secret to his friends and employers that one of the reasons Chris loved his work was his excuse to be out in wild places.

Since graduating in 1987 with a BS from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, Chris did job after job that allowed him to explore nature and develop the impressive breadth of knowledge that gained him the respect of many a biologist. He started out as a fisheries research assistant in Corvallis, Oregon. He was an interpretive naturalist in Friday Harbor, Washington. As a technical aide with the Washington Department of Wildlife, Chris assisted on Gyrfalcon and Peregrine Falcon, studies. Again he worked on Peregrine Falcons for The Peregrine Fund to reintroduce the raptor in Washington state. He worked as a biological research assistant once more in Corvallis, Oregon. He did a stint as a wildlife consultant in Seattle, Washington. Chris worked yet again with raptors in Ephrata, Washington and for the National Park Service in Fairbanks, Alaska. All along the way Chris offered his experience and expertise to others. We all relied on him for his broad knowledge as a naturalist. If you found a feather in the forest and took it to Chris he could tell you what spe-

cies it came from. If you saw a small, thin mammal with a black tail bouncing around Libby Flats in the Snowy Range he would tell you it was a long tailed weasel, what it ate, and how it survived the winter. He believed in the ideals of conservation education and often gave presentations to kids. This past year he started Peregrinations, an eco-tourism company as yet another way of extending outdoor experiences to others, pay the bills, and stay close to nature himself. Chris's entire professional career was a commitment to conservation, to others, and a long personal wander in the wilds.

When Chris wasn't making his living working for various agencies and organizations for the welfare of wildlife, he was kayaking in Belize, Baja, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and most recently in Thailand and North Vietnam. He had a trip in the works to explore the coast of Baffin Island by kayak. He'd hiked Alaska and walked the remote interior of Ellsmere Island National Park in Canada. He explored untold miles in the broad basins and ranges of Wyoming.

From an early age Christopher held a fascination for raptors, particularly falcons. Much of Christopher's work experience led him to a deepening of his love of falcons. All of us who knew Chris remember him with his falcons and his dogs, Bonehead and Dot, the hyperactive bird dog duo. To watch Chris hunt sage grouse with his bird and his dogs was to witness a man in his element. This past fall Chris told of one of his most moving flights with his falcon. The sun was just below the horizon, the Wyoming sky pink and blue, Cielo, his falcon, a thousand feet above held her eye precisely on her prey. Both dogs were on point, and Chris, in that perfect spot known to the falconer's world, found grace in a most perfect unity of bird, dog, prey, and a man.

Chris is survived by his mother, Jan Rivera and brother, Robert, both of Delaware; his father, Jan Garber and sisters, Ericka Gray and Alexandra Garber, all of Pennsylvania; sister Loren Ferro of Washington; and a family of friends throughout the world.



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A Remembrance of Chris Garber — by Doug Pineo

Conservation and falconry lost a wonderful friend on January 21 when Chris Garber died in an avalanche while back-country skiing in the Snowy Range near his home south of Laramie, Wyoming. He was 33 years old. Characteristically, he was in the company of two expert telemarkers, having fun while seeking to learn more. He outlived most of us in many respects.

Chris pursued his passion for the natural world in every aspect of his life. He was a fine zoologist and conservation biologist, working with pigmy rabbits, ferruginous hawks, gyrfalcons and peregrines in Washington state, as a raptor biologist in Gates of the Arctic National Park, and for 5 years as the Heritage zoologist for the Wyoming Nature Conservancy. Chris was a superb photographer and an experienced adventurer and wilderness traveler. He hiked and kayaked in Central America, southwest Asia, the high plains and desert basins of the West, and the Alaskan and Canadian Arctic. He was a peregrine hack-site attendant in Washington's Columbia Gorge. In Wyoming he surveyed rare toads, salamanders, bats and the plant communities in which they live.

Chris, whom it was my pleasure to sponsor in falconry while he was studying at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, was best known in American falconry as a serious grouse hawker during his years in Wyoming. The last half of his hawking career featured "Cielo", his gyr/Barbary, and the famous pointers "Bone" and "Dot". These two shrub-steppe cruisers pointed grouse for many Wyoming falconers, but got good with Chris and Cielo. Chris focused lots of energy on working with good dogs, and avoided frequently acquiring new birds. He was richly rewarded for this approach.

Chris's life was a vigorous celebration of our natural world, good music and art, and friendship. At his memorial in Laramie, a packed hall of friends, falconers, biologists, artists, adventurers and their

families gathered to remember his extraordinary generosity, his gentle manner, his commitment to conservation, his travels and adventures, and his fine company. For Chris, there was no conflict in celebrating the diversity of life on this planet, and, pursuing the hunt with great passion. Chris honored the deer he shot, the grouse brought to foot by Cielo, and their sagebrush home. He knew all the wildlife he encountered and their ecology. There were no "dicky birds" in his world. He held no prejudice against man, woman or beast. This is one of the great lessons of Chris's life.

Chris died with his boots on, pursuing his bliss in a wild place he held dear. He has left us to follow, as he did, Edward Abbey's advice, "So get out there and hunt and fish and mess around with your friends, ramble out yonder and explore the forests, encounter the grizz, climb the mountains, bag the peaks, run the rivers, breathe deep of that yet sweet and lucid air, sit quietly for a while and contemplate the precious stillness, that lovely mysterious and awesome space." Thank you, Chris.





Reflections by His Mother, Jan Rivera

Thank you for being Christopher's friends. It's good to know Chris was in the midst of people who appreciated and cared for him; despite his living so far from his family.

You knew Chris as a friend. He was my first-born child, my first-born son. I will never stop being amazed and grateful that he was mine. Being his mother is like being a duck who hatched a swan.

All parents believe their children are special; Christopher truly was. He had an exceptional gentleness and inner grace. Everything alive responded to him. He literally charmed birds out of the trees. Children were attracted to him as if he were the Pied Piper. They knew he was, in the very best way, still one of them: his sense of wonder and delight was still intact.

A quiet light shone from him. It still does. Like you, his family is gathering for a memorial service. I know this is supposed to be an occasion for fac-

ing facts and saying goodbye, as well as for remembering. The facts are inescapable, and we must accept them, but I cannot and never will say goodbye-- not while the natural world Christopher loved so deeply exists. Christopher is too much a part of it for his spirit to leave us entirely.

Chris once wrote to me that he found his God in the wild places. I have always believed God blessed him with exceptional gifts. Christopher drew affection to him as naturally as he breathed. He had an instinctive way with animals from the time he could crawl. The gardens he planted-- starting with a packet of seeds he ordered from a catalog "for a penny you have to have earned yourself," when he was five-- grew as if fairy dust had been sprinkled on them.

People often say they regret not having said "I love you" before it was too late. That, at least, is one grief his family will not have to bear. Christopher knew how much we loved him. He knew there wasn't a day we didn't think of him and long to

have him with us. It was hard on us that he so seldom was with us. When Christopher walked into the house, the center of gravity seemed to shift-- we all clustered in the part of the room where he was, as if the floor had tilted. It was always so hard to let him go. I hated driving him back to the airport.

To be a parent is to give over a hostage to a fate you cannot control. The call from the sheriff was the one I had been terrified of receiving every day since Chris was old enough to go outside without holding my hand.

But letting go of Chris was not only inevitable, it was right. Christopher needed to be free, and he was. Christopher was called to his own kind of life, and he lived it, every day, on his own terms.

We were so proud of him. It was a family joke that Chris had been turning over rocks to look for frogs from the time he could walk, and now he was getting paid for it. In my eyes, Christopher has always remained my beautiful little boy, but those are the sentiments of a mother. The small boy in my heart was also a fine and upright man. Chris said little, yet felt so much. He was an extraordinarily tender and caring person who could not abide cruelty, to people or animals; a peaceful man who lived his life with seamless integrity.

I was so very, very lucky to have him. He will be missed, every single day. It hurts immeasurably that I can never hug or be hugged by him again, that the younger children in the family will be deprived of him as they grow up, and most of all, that he did not have more time. I know, though, what Christopher was able to do in the time he had. I will, as we Quakers say, "hold him the Light" all my days. I hope you will too.



Chris

*The way you hugged
Your quiet way of saying so much
The way you spoke
Your laughter
Your spark
Your tears*

*White dog needles everywhere
Falcon feathers
Hunting dance
And then,
beer*

*That little dimple on your chin ...
Chris, soaring bird
in my heart forever*

*Astrid
Laramie, January 24, 1996*



Albany County resident dies in avalanche

By Robert Roten
Boomerang Staff Writer

probe the snow. They found Garber and dug him out.

