



Board of Supervisors Memorandum

April 7, 2015

Naming of the Chuck Bowden Mount Lemmon Community Center

Background

The purpose of this memorandum is to request the renaming of the Mount Lemmon Community Center (MLCC) the Chuck Bowden Mount Lemmon Community Center.

Constructed in 2008 with 2004 voter-authorized General Obligation bonds, the MLCC is a visitor and information center administered and maintained by the County's Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Department. The community center includes meeting room space, public restrooms and a public plaza.

Charles "Chuck" Bowden passed away in August 2014 after a distinguished and award winning career as a writer, journalist and environmental advocate. Chuck wrote over two dozen books and was a regular contributor to *Arizona Highways* magazine, *USA Today*, *The New York Times Book Review* and many other publications. He won the Lannan literary prize for nonfiction in 1996 and received the PEN Centre First Amendment Award in 2011.

Early in his career, Chuck Bowden was a crime reporter for the former *Tucson Citizen*. He moved to Tucson as a youth, attending Tucson High School and The University of Arizona. He lived in Tucson most of his life, moving to Las Cruces, New Mexico five years before his death.

Mount Lemmon is known to many as "Chuck's Mountain." He hiked the mountain for years and shared his experiences and love of the mountain, along with Pulitzer Prize winning photographer Jack Drykinga, in Frog Mountain Blues, published in 1987. Former US Secretary of the Interior and former Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt said of Frog Mountain Blues, "*Anyone interested in the survival of our most precious natural resources should read this book.*"

A letter of support for the renaming of the MLCC from *Arizona Highways* Publisher Win Holden is attached to this memorandum.

Recommendation

I recommend the Board of Supervisors approve the renaming of the Mount Lemmon Community Center the Chuck Bowden Mount Lemmon Community Center.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Huckelberry".

C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator

CHH/mjk – April 2, 2015
Attachment

ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

March 25, 2015

Mr. Ray Carroll
130 W. Congress Street, 11th Floor
Tucson, AZ 85701

Dear Mr. Carroll,

I am pleased to offer this letter of support for the proposed renaming of the Mount Lemmon Community Center to the Charles Bowden Mount Lemmon Community Center as a tribute to Mr. Bowden and in recognition of his enviable accomplishments as a journalist, environmental activist and adorer of Southern Arizona.

I first met Chuck Bowden when I was Publisher of Phoenix Magazine in the 1990's. He was a frequent contributor to that magazine. When I joined Arizona Highways in 2000, I was delighted that the Editor at the time (and, notably both who have followed him) were admirers of Mr. Bowden's exceptional writing skill. Accordingly, Chuck's work has appeared in Arizona Highways for many, many years.

Chuck's range of intellectual pursuits was legendary – as was his disdain for the lowly comma. Long sentences were Chuck's stock in trade. But what sentences they were. His writing was often melodic, always insightful and frequently moving. Especially so when he wrote of his love for Southern Arizona, Tucson and the singular Sonoran Desert landscape.

Often, Chuck found solitude and inspiration on Mount Lemmon. He wrote frequently about Mount Lemmon and always in celebratory and even reverent terms. He was personally and painfully stung by the fire that defaced his beloved mountain. A place where he regularly went hiking or riding his bicycle or simply found a comfortable log to sit upon and contemplate the vagaries of life. He felt personally wounded by any fire – but respectful of fires sometimes serving as nature's cleansing agents.

Building the Mount Lemmon Community Center following the most recent fire on "Chuck's mountain" provides a meaningful and relevant opportunity to permanently link Chuck to Mount Lemmon by naming the facility the Charles Bowden Mount Lemmon Community Center.

Chuck would find significance in the facility sited in such a wondrous and inspirational place in Sabino National Park. It just seems fitting to place his name, a name that appeared on countless stories about the importance of respect and care for the natural world. It will also serve as a lasting tribute to his decades of support and celebration for wild space preservation and public access to such places. For all of these reasons and more, I am honored to add my name to the lengthy list of supporters for this initiative.

Best regards,



Win Holden
Publisher

— IN MEMORIAM —

CHARLES BOWDEN

1945 – 2014

HUMMINGBIRDS. Some are as little as 2.29 inches long, and none are bigger than pocket-sized. They're among the world's smallest vertebrates, and yet, they played a large role in the life of Charles Bowden. "There is nothing in my day that matters to me beyond birds, walking and reading." That's from a recent entry in a journal Chuck called "Creek Log." He was fascinated by birds — hummingbirds in particular — and the seduction goes back to his childhood.

"As a boy," he wrote in an essay, "I'd walk the dog under a tree in the corner of the park at twilight and hummingbirds would hover just over my head. I knew nothing of their customs or various nations then. But my boy's eyes glimpsed an open door as the night came down and the promise of what I could be and learn if I left the everyday world and spun up into the sky."

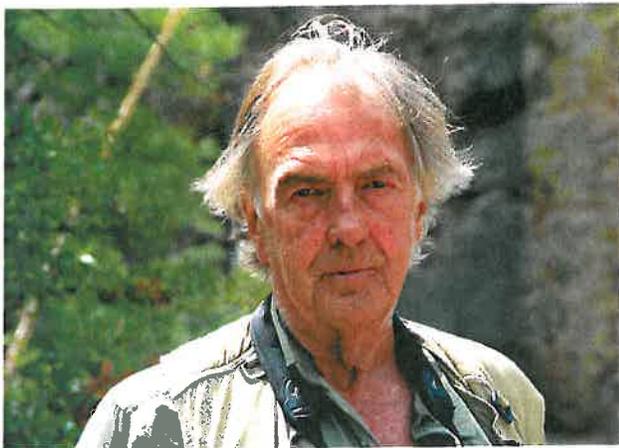
The essay is titled *Mysterious Little Birds*, and it's featured on page 46. As writers, we all have access to the same set of vowels and consonants, but Chuck was the master of composition — he'd string together words the way Mozart paired notes and Monet combined colors.

"The land rose, a river cut, the entrails of the earth came into view, time beyond human comprehension loomed up like a wall and the hand could rub and feel billions of years." That's from an essay about the Grand Canyon.

In another essay, one in which I was expecting an obituary for a battered national monument, he wrote a beautiful piece about hopefulness: "I stand in the shade of an ironwood that is likely older than my nation and I have the faith of a pupfish, surviving century after century in a desert. Organ Pipe is open for business and its business is to teach the power of life in a very hot place. We made a deal with the ground and the bad times cannot touch our dreams."

Of course, his mastery of the written word went beyond the pages of *Arizona Highways*. He wrote more than two dozen books and won a long list of writing awards. He was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and when the editors of *Esquire* selected the 70 best sentences in the history of their magazine, Chuck was in the mix, along with Hemingway, Steinbeck and Fitzgerald.

As you'd expect, it's the quintessential sentence. I share it with my students when I teach magazine writing at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism. I share it and tell them to write as if every word were on trial for its life. That's how Chuck did



MOLLY MOLLOY

it, but for him, the exercise went beyond vowels and consonants. He was meticulous about his punctuation, too. Or the lack thereof.

If you're familiar with Chuck's writing, you know that he liked to write long sentences without the burden of commas. Although it kept our proofreaders up at night, the rule around here was simple: No red marks on Chuck's copy. Only he had that kind of immunity, and now there's no one.

Chuck died on August 30, 2014. I was sitting in the sand, staring at the Pacific, when I got the details from Molly, his loving partner. "Surreal" is one of the most overused words in our language — one that's rarely acquitted when on trial for its life — but the news about Chuck was surreal. I'd just talked to him a few days earlier. He'd pitched me an idea for the magazine, and we discussed some new essays. It never occurred to me that that would be it. No more vowels, no more consonants, no more inspiration. I can't put into words what I was feeling, but I remember thinking: "*Surreal*" is a word that should be reserved for the unexpected death of Charles Bowden.

I also thought about the first time I met Chuck. It was more than 20 years ago. My mentor, Dick Vonier, introduced us. Dick and Chuck had been rabble-raising journalists in Tucson — the Butch and Sundance of independent magazines. Dick was quiet, and usually went unnoticed in a roomful of writers, but Chuck was an alluring combination of Hunter S. Thompson, Edward Abbey and Aldo Leopold. Writer, activist, teacher ... Chuck was smart. He had a degree in American intellectual history from the University of Wisconsin, and he had a lot to say. About human rights, the environment and even hummingbirds.

Although I wanted more, it's fitting that Chuck's last words for *Arizona Highways* were about his beloved hummingbirds. He was in Patagonia, working on *Mysterious Little Birds*, when he started getting sick. Just before he headed home to Molly in New Mexico, he sent her an email: "I feel better — slept. I try to comfort myself with thinking of the past."

He wasn't specific in his message to Molly, but I suspect one of those memories was about a dog and a tree and a park — a place where hummingbirds would hover over his head at twilight. I hope all of his final memories were beautiful. Like the beautiful words he wrote for all of us.

So long, Chuck. Say hello to Dick.

— ROBERT STIEVE, EDITOR