

Tribute to David Getches

To say David Getches did many things and did them well is a huge understatement. His life is a tribute superior intellectual ability combined with unstoppable energy and a mild-mannered disposition to work toward the greater good. In short, David was a man who mattered.

David's work career spanned many disciplines and he approached all with vigor. It's fair to say he accomplished in any five-year span of his work life as much, or more, than most of us will in our entire careers. Yet, despite a life of tremendous accomplishment, he was one of the most humble people you'd ever meet. Self-congratulation and boasting were as foreign to his character as resting on his laurels.

I knew David as a humble giant of the natural resources community. He touched thousands of lives in the fields of water, public lands, wildlife management, and air quality. Now that he is gone, I see him more clearly as a toolmaker who, through his work and guidance, developed in others the capacity for having a positive impact in our local communities, states, the country, and around the world.

I met David in May 1993, upon completion of my first year of law school at CU, when I applied to become his research assistant. In the years that followed, he wore many hats for me.

As a law school professor, he challenged us, no matter what our level of knowledge or capacity to learn. He was a great lecturer, but was best at letting you figure it out. He had the patience to let you finish a thought even if it wasn't yet fully-formed. He was solution-oriented; he assigned a mid-term paper that had us draft amendments to existing statutes, and explain why we felt the changes were needed.

As my boss, he was a role model for precision, excellence, and guidance. He didn't make an overt demand for me to do my best work. It was unspoken. You felt you owed it to him. He framed great research projects; many were fun as well as challenging. To help him prepare for a celebration at Grand Canyon National Park, he set me on the task of gathering accounts of what people thought and felt when they came upon the Canyon for the first time. In the Dark Ages before easy access to the Web, it took the better part of a day to gather up a dozen accounts, from Teddy Roosevelt to Edward Abbey.

As a public servant, David was selfless in his dedication of time and energy. In the 1980s he served as the director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. He also served on the boards of many non-profit organizations. He was the founding board president of Western Resource Advocates (then called Land and Water Fund of the Rockies), where I've had the good fortune to work for a dozen years. He helped launch our group—dedicated to finding solutions that protect the West's land, air, and water—and held it on a steady course through the inevitable rough patches in the first years of any new group.

I'll remember David best and as a man who lived a virtuous life, spending time with his wife Anne, his kids, and enjoying his friends and the great outdoors. I saw him with a sore shoulder once, from a pole that fell while setting up a teepee! He was my hero for riding his bike to work nearly every day. Though he didn't need to, he kept it humble and paid attention to the small details of living a good life.

It is so very sad that David is gone. But he lives on in all of us in our dedication to the work we do and how we treat our fellow inhabitants here on earth. We best honor David by doing him proud.