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“WHAT TIME IS IT? TIME TO LIVE.”

—Everett Ruess

Everett Ruess, a young artist, poet and wanderer, left California for Arizona and Utah in 1934, never to be heard from again. Although he sought the lonely trail, during four years of wilderness adventures Everett had been a dedicated correspondent, writing long and beautiful letters to his family and friends, often containing poetry. These pages capture his gift of reflection and expression and inspire everyone to follow life's trail with beauty, passion and conviction.

THE MYSTERY OF
Everett Ruess

RUSHO

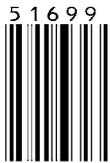
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THE MYSTERY OF

Everett Ruess

W. L. Rusho

CHAPTER 3

The LETTERS 1931

UPON HIS RETURN TO LOS ANGELES from the Sierras, Everett completed his high school education, graduating in January 1931 from Hollywood High School. He immediately began making preparations to spend several months traveling in northern Arizona, where he planned to “buy myself a little burro, change my name, and call him Everett.” When he departed he headed specifically for Monument Valley. In his letters he gives no clue as to how he happened to know about this scenic red rock desert,

since in those days general public knowledge about Monument Valley was limited. It was not yet a favorite location for Western movies, and references to the place that had appeared in books, newspapers, and magazines were brief and sparse. Possibly his mother, through her interests in art, had talked to an artist who had been there. At least when Everett arrived in Monument Valley he did seem to know just what to expect. It was a rough thing for him to do. Alone and friendless, he wandered into this desert land of the Navajos

in late winter, virtually penniless, paying his small expenses by doing odd jobs and occasionally selling one of his watercolors or blockprints. In the 1930s, even more than today, such an act was almost unheard of and thought of as genuinely foolhardy.

THE INDIAN COUNCIL CAVE

Wand'ring among the painted
 rocks one day
 I saw some ancient, moss-grown
 boulders there
 That leaned together in a friendly
 way
 And formed a cave that might
 have housed a bear.
 But on the high arched ceiling
 were designs
 And symbols that some Indian had
 drawn;
 A rising sun, marked out in faint
 red lines,
 A row of running wolves, a deer
 and fawn.
 Bones from forgotten feasts
 were on the floor,
 Picked clean by men who sat
 around a fire
 Discussing and deciding peace or
 war
 Or chanting solemn prayers, in gay
 attire.
 The cave is empty now, the paintings fade . . .
 And here the silent centuries invade.

—EVERETT RUESS, PUBLISHED IN *The American Indian*, APRIL 1929



FEBRUARY 13 GENERAL DELIVERY KAYENTA, ARIZONA

Dear Bill,

Here I am at last on what was, ten years ago, the final frontier. An Indian mailcarrier brought me from Flagstaff. I haven't met a single person on the way who I thought ought to be shot.

I've been bargaining with some Navajos about a burro, and I'll have to put out eight dollars for one. Most of the Navajos don't speak English, and an interpreter is necessary. Practically all of the burros are down with the sheep now. In the summer it is much easier to buy them.

When I was going to Needles in a Buick Eight with an old gentleman and his dog Jerry, traveling seventy-five miles per hour, the famous miner's hat blew off. I have worn the wool cap most of the time, since there has been no sun to keep off.

I drove to Oatman with a potato truck. After I had unloaded a ton of potatoes to earn my lunch, a friend of the driver took me on to Kingman, before I could eat the lunch.

Beyond Kingman, I was picked up by a couple of Long Beach toughs who were driving to New York in a Dodge. Having no money, they had siphoned their gasoline from other people's cars. It got dark that night (!) and as they had no lights driving was difficult. For about ten miles we kept just ahead of another car, driving by its lights. Then it dropped behind and we nearly went into the ditch. Tearing up a few fence posts, we started a fire and waited for the moon to rise and show us the way. The moon became the standing joke. It didn't come up till four o'clock in the morning. In the meantime we all crouched around the fire. One of the men slept on a slope right next to the fire, with his arms across his breast. Gravity kept working, and every few minutes his arm would steal down to the ground and the fire. It would get hot and slowly return to his breast. Finally it got burnt and the sleeper awakened.

At moonrise, we rolled onward, through Seligman to Ash Fork, where we arrived on an empty tank. I gave them half a dollar, and they begged a few dimes from sympathetic strangers. Twenty-five miles from Flagstaff all the gas was gone. They picked up a tramp who gave them his only quarter. They walked a mile to a gas station and we drove on again till the gas gave