



Katie Lee: An Eclectic and Wild-Riding Career

Katie Lee has emerged as one of the Southwest's most outspoken environmental activists. Like David Brower and Ed Abbey, Katie has taken up the torch they left burning when they died to sing, write and lecture about the importance of preserving and restoring wilderness refuges; the lonesome characters the West still breeds; and the histories of ancient races embedded in its sinuous sandstone canyons. Today, her unwavering commitment to her principles and feisty eloquence are primarily directed at draining Powell Reservoir and letting the Colorado River once again run wild.

According to the late Ellen Meloy, author of *Raven's Exile*, in her foreword to Katie Lee's third book, *Sandstone Seduction*, Katie is: "*Outrageous, mischievous, and never shy about calling a shithead a shithead, Lee is a woman so far ahead of her time, we are still catching up. She writes with fists and flesh to the wall, rendering an acid hatred for the canyon's destroyers and a near perfect sense of the deep pleasure that comes when a few companions float downriver and share beauty by instinct rather than conversation.*"

Now in her upper-eighties, Katie has had an eclectic and wild-riding career. A native Arizonan, Katie Lee began her professional career in 1948 as a stage and screen actress. She performed in motion pictures in Hollywood, had running parts on four major NBC radio shows, including *The Great Gildersleeve* and *One Man's Family*; in the early 50's, she was a pioneer actress and folk music director on *The Telephone Hour* with Helen Parrish. In the mid-50's she left Hollywood to spend 10 years as a performer in coffeehouses and cabarets throughout the US, Canada and Mexico, singing folksongs to her own guitar.

Katie's first book, *Ten Thousand Goddam Cattle, A History of the American Cowboy in Song, Story and Verse*, takes the reader on a tour of the West and its people as the author tells the process of her rediscovery of the sources of the cowboy's music.

"A beautiful job...exact, comprehensive and witty. Should remain a basic history of the subject for many years to come." Ed Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, et al.

"Katie Lee's book of cowboy songs and commentary, *Ten Thousand Goddam Cattle*, is a classic. And besides all her knowledge, she really knows how to sing these songs." Hal Cannon, Executive Director of the famous Folk Life Center in Elko, Nevada.

In conjunction with the book, Katie made an award-winning television documentary, *The Last Wagon*, which celebrated the lives of Gail Gardner and Billy Simon, Arizona's cowboy legends. The film won the 1972 Cine Golden Eagle Award. She also released several recordings of cowboy songs for her own label, Katydid Books and Music: Ten Thousand Goddam Cattle, a double album of songs from the book by the same name.

Katie Lee's published her second book, *All My Rivers Are Gone*, in 1999 with Johnson Books in Boulder Colorado. The book brings Glen Canyon back to life as she tells about her journeys down the Colorado River with a few close friends. It was republished in 2006 by Fretwater Press, Arizona under the new title *Glen Canyon Betrayed – A Sensuous Elegy*. This new publication features an Afterword, many more photos, an index and beautiful new cover painting by Serena Supplee; The Foreword by Terry Tempest Williams.

"In so many ways, this is a woman who embodies the power and tenacious beauty of the Colorado Plateau. Her spitfire intelligence and redrock resolve provides us with an individual conscience that we would do well to adopt. Katie Lee is a joyful raconteur, a woman with grit, grace and humor. She is not afraid to laugh and tease, cajole and flirt, cuss, rant, howl, sing and cry. Katie Lee is the desert's lover. Her voice is a torch in the wilderness."

Just as the Sierras were John Muir's refuge, Glen Canyon was Katie's. For more than a decade she regularly ran, guided, photographed and explored the canyon; knew the river guides and characters that roamed there; and named many of its side canyons. In 1953 she was the 175th person to run the Grand Canyon after John Wesley Powell's first run in 1869, and the third woman to run all rapids in Grand Canyon. Ten years later, despite Lee's and other's protests against the Glen's destruction, Glen Canyon Dam was completed-190 miles of Glen Canyon and Colorado River drowned beneath Powell reservoir; leaving a truncated Grand Canyon to shift for itself with intermittent flows of ice water. A river no more!

Her anger over the "political damning of an Eden unequalled," became the driving force that turned her into an environmental activist and agitator. Katie says of her early activist efforts: "Our efforts, with meager numbers and unschooled politics, were like trying to put out a wildfire with a teacup."

Two recordings were released in tandem with the book—Colorado River Songs: Katie singing songs she wrote about the river and Glen Canyon River Journeys, featuring readings from the book and singing some songs.

Sandstone Seduction, her third book, is a collection of essays about growing up in the laid back town of Tucson with her cowboy buddies and Mexican border friends; about life as a Hollywood actress; wilderness river explorer and guide; of adventures in Baja California, Mexico, Alaska and Jerome, Arizona—where she has lived since 1971.

Her current offering is a DVD, *Love Song to Glen Canyon*. The DVD features Katie talking and singing about Glen Canyon against the background of 140 color photographs that she took on her river journeys through the canyon in the fifties and sixties, before this beautiful canyon was drowned.

Katie serves on the Advisory Board of the Glen Canyon Institute, a nonprofit organization that advocates the draining of Powell Reservoir and restoring the natural ecosystem, health and beauty of the Colorado River through a truncated Grand Canyon. In the past few years she has been featured often in radio interviews and television and movie documentaries.

Periodicals & Anthologies

Numerous nonfiction articles in such publications as *Arizona Highways*, *Arizona Historical Quarterly* and the now defunct *City Magazine*, edited by renowned author Charles Bowden. Several chapters from *Sandstone Seduction* have appeared in *Canyon Country Zephyr*; *Mountain Gazette*, *American Whitewater Journal*; *Wild Earth*; *Boatman's Quarterly Review*; *The Waiting List* (Grand Canyon Private Boater's Assn. Magazine) *Hidden Passage*, a *Glen Canyon Institute Quarterly* and *Inside/Outside*

Katie's essays and stories have turned up in numerous anthologies over the years. Some of the later ones are: "Land That We Love" Ed. Barry Scholl, a USDA Publication for the Olympics 2002, Salt Lake City. "Grand Canyon Women", Betty Leaven good, Pruett Pub. Co., Boulder, CO. "When In Doubt Go Higher" Ed. M. John Fayhee, Mt. Sports Press, Boulder, CO. "Sisters of the Earth", Ed. Lorraine Anderson, Vintage Press, 1991-2003, NY, NY. "Hell's Half Mile", Ed. Michael Engelhard, Breakaway Books, Moab, UT. *NATURE'S RESTORTION--People and Places on the Front Lines of Conservation*, Peter Friederici, Island Press, 2006

Media Highlights

- Troubled Waters: "The Dilemma of Dams" by documentary filmmakers Beth and George Gage. The film won Telluride Film Festival "Ecological Award" in 2001
- Mark Riesner's PBS video series, "Cadillac Desert"
- Interview on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" with Rene Montaigne
- Television documentary: *The Dilemma of Grand Canyon: The Ecosystem Paradox*. Japanese TV
- German TV Series "Mein Amerika" w/ Claus Kleber
- British TV Series, "Naked Planet" by Wall to Wall Television
- Glen Canyon Institute Video, "Let The River Run," w/ David Brower
- University of Utah KUED 7 Video, "GLEN CANYON-A Dam, Water & The West"
- KAET-TV Phoenix, AZ. "The Goldwater Lecture Series"
- "River Runners of the Grand Canyon," Don Briggs
- "Woman of the Week" for Women of the West Museum, Boulder, CO. 10/99
- Feature performer at "The Dam Rally" at Glen Canyon Dam, April 2000
- "The Open Road" PBS Series produced by Hal Cannon

Awards

- Cine Golden Eagle Award, 1972 (Council of International Non-theatrical Events). Her documentary, "The Last Wagon", was chosen to represent the USA in International Motion Picture Events.
- Winner of the Glen Canyon Institute's David Brower Award for outstanding environmental activism 2001
- First Culture Treasure Keepers of Canyon Country Award - 2001. By Gary Nabhan - Center for sustainable Environment, Northern Arizona University & the Ford Foundation .2002
- Entrada Institute's Ward Roylance Award - for Commitment too Arts and Outdoor Education. 2003
- Recipient of Tucson-Pima Public Library's Lawrence Clark Powell Lifetime Achievement Award. 2005.