

ED LACHAPELLE¹

Ron Perla²

We all know and admire Ed LaChapelle's scientific contributions. Tonight, Howie asked that I address more his human side. From 1966 to 1971, I worked 1/2 time as a research assistant to Ed LaChapelle. He would assign me tasks winter and summer but allow me considerable freedom to follow independent lines. Personal freedom, individualism, self sufficiency are qualities that are very important to Ed.

I was always impressed by how Ed would find the proper balance of those ideals within the constraints of our organization, our employer, our love-hate sponsors, the US Forest Service. Working for the Forest Service seemed to me, sometimes, like doing another hitch in the U. S. Marine Corps. The paradox of our beloved-hated organization was, that by nature of its mission, it attracted rugged, freedom loving, individuals like Ed and Binx. And let me slip in one more name, Ray Lindquist. Because the other 1/2 time I worked as a snow and summer ranger in Little Cottonwood, reporting to Ray Lindquist. He taught me the art of snow rangers, tolerated my foibles, and was happy to have me on his team *only* after my miraculous avalanche survival which spared him a year of paper work.

More than once, the Forest Supervisor's Office (the SO) would chase me to the Upper Guard Station, where I would shelter myself behind Ed, who would ask "What did Perla do this time?" "Ed, it was worst than last time", and then would come the SO grievances. And Ed would always protect me. In fact, speaking of miracles, he even convinced the SO to promote me twice before my exile from Alta. Ed's guidance has continued through the exile, even though we have lived far apart.

I have been asked to tell a few LaChapelle stories. This is my favorite. It happened in the late 1960's. Binx Sandahl, Will Bassett and I had just completed an active morning of control, and had opened much of the Alta Ski Area. An eager weekend ski crowd was heading toward the new powder. It was a beautiful, sunny crisp day. Excellent powder. I climbed to the Upper Guard Station to assist Ed. I found him standing in front of the large window, with its panoramic view of the Alta Ski Area. He seemed to be concerned that a chute on West Rustler, which had been shot that morning, had not slid. Ed radioed to Sandahl and Bassett to shut down half the mountain, and retarget the stubborn chute. Yes, at times Ed could be critical and demanding. But I had never seen anything like this before. Reclose half the mountain just after it was opened with skiers straining at the bit to dive in! A weekend crowd was to be denied their powder on the chance, always just a chance, that we could produce an avalanche on our command! I watched the drama unfold. Slowly, the ski crowd started to shift away from the target area toward the

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²Box 694, Canmore AB T0L 0M0, CANADA. e-mail: 73750.2410@COMPUSERVE.COM

WildCat lift. The word was out, and many skiers simply positioned themselves to watch the action. Will Bassett led a control team above the chute, and tossed in the charge. I felt the entire reputation of the Forest Service was at stake. Well, the ski crowd was treated to a spectacular powder avalanche that ran its full path to an area which, an hour ago, had been heavily populated with skiers. Now, that was avalanche forecasting.

I have always admired Ed for his stoicism, and unlike most of us, a strong ability *not* to complain. For example, I will never forget when Ed came to visit me in Canmore to get me started on wet snow experiments. Our lab was in Canmore's only professional building, which also contained the local dentist office. In the middle of one of our experiments, Ed suddenly announced something to the effect "its time this damn tooth came out." And with no further ado, he went off to the dentist, to return to the experiment in a little over an hour, minus one wisdom tooth. I felt that an inflamed wisdom tooth, and its extraction deserves at least two days of complaining, but I couldn't get even a few precious whimpers from Ed.

Ed could be mischievous and fond of practical jokes. This happened at the first National Avalanche School in Reno, I believe in 1971. In order to change the rhythm of the lecture presentations, I wrote a little stage play called "Rules of thumb for back country travel." Ed consented to play the lead character. We went up on the stage, and I began according to the script. Unknown to me, Ed had decided *not* to follow the script, but to improvise at random. The resulting performance, which eventually broke down into total disorder, was a complete farce, and the end of my playwriting career.