

# Gary Sprung: Freedom Through Tolerance

by Paul Andersen

**IN GUNNISON COUNTY, FREEDOM HAS** a variety of meanings. The landscape and the social environment offer opportunities for those seeking them. It has been said that you can be what you want to be. All you need is the push and the pluck to do it.

For Gary Sprung, Gunnison County and Crested Butte in particular have furnished the tolerance for the freedom he has been seeking since finishing school at Brown University in Rhode Island in 1976.

"I got tired of the East and all the urbanized, uptight, high tension people. I was one of those people too and didn't like the way it felt. I wanted to change."

Born in Chicago and raised and schooled in Highland Park, Illinois, a prestigious suburb of the Windy City, Sprung had his fill of city life. He came West in search of an alternative and spent time in Boulder, Durango and other areas of the state where he travelled as a Nordic skier.

In October of 1979, he decided Crested Butte was the place to settle. "I knew the cross-country skiing was great and have found that the community is a good place to live. I have a lot of friends and activities and the politics are stimulating."

Gary Sprung, or Gnurps (Sprung spelled backwards), as



Gary Sprung...Photo by Paul Andersen

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his friends know him, is now hip deep in politics, but not exclusively the politics of the town. He has taken on the job of representing Friends of the Earth (FOE) in Gunnison

County and has become a strong voice in wilderness preservation. Sprung attributes his conservation ethic to Highland Park, which sits on the shore of Lake Michigan on a glacial moraine. The area is laced with lushly foliated ravines that run down to the Lake's sandy beach.

"I watched the area become overdeveloped and it disturbed me. When I was in Rhode Island, the cultural impact of the university took me away from that and I focused on intellectual pursuits. It took a year of living in Colorado for that side of me to show itself again. I became inspired by the area and began educating myself on the environment and the realities of the political scene."

Sprung is impressed with FOE. He considers it the best environmental organization in the world since it is an international group with sister organizations in 26 countries. The motto of the organization, which publishes a monthly newsletter, has become Sprung's credo:

*"To have freedom is only to have that which is absolutely necessary to enable us to be what we ought to be, and to possess what we ought to possess."*

**Rahel**

*"...the greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe. Love that, not man apart from that..."*

**Robinson Jeffers**

The concepts promoted by FOE are based on biology and ecology, said Sprung, which are founded in science. The understanding that mankind is dependent upon the earth may take a long time to filter into the minds of people, but that is the end Sprung is working toward.

When he is not working on environmental matters, Sprung is a dishwasher or "pearl diver," as they are fondly dubbed. While that occupation may not be in context with his formal education in art, photography, history, anthropology, sociology and philosophy, it has afforded him the freedom and time to pursue his genuine interests.

"On a personal level, I feel free. In Crested Butte, physical freedom is important. Out in the mountains, you can be alone in a non-human world. It helps to change and grow. Standing on top of a mountain and looking down to town gives a different perspective, a different scale."

Sprung also values the freedom he has gained through the tolerance of the people in Crested Butte. He said new ideas and concepts and non-conformity are accepted in town. There is also a special freedom from mechanization. "I don't feel like a slave to machines," he said.

While Sprung may be considered a New Age pioneer in Crested Butte and Gunnison County, he disagrees with the philosophy of the traditional pioneer spirit.

"One concept of the pioneer spirit I don't like is rape and ruin, conquering the land. There are a lot of strengths in that attitude which were necessary to create civilization in the West, but it is not appropriate now."