

The Last Season by Eric Blehm (2006)

Randy Morgenson [RM] grew up in the Yosemite Valley in the 40's & 50's. His dad, Dana, studied wildflowers & led camera walks for visitors. Ansel Adams was a family friend. He loved his brother growing up, but Larry was never the same after the Korean war. In the 60's he quit college & joined the Peace Corps to avoid the draft. He spent time in India & Nepal, climbing some of the mtns.

Randy became a seasonal [May-Oct] park ranger in '65, but found YNP too busy. He worked in Sequoia NP & Kings Canyon NP. His mantra was to protect the people from the park & the park from the people. He had an irresistible pull to nature like Jack London's "call of the wild". A magazine accepted his article, but he couldn't respond in time [he was in the back country]. Randy & Judi were married in '75. They loved their time together, but were independent enough to endure their times apart. They bought a 700-sf house in Susanville, CA where he let the grass grow 'naturally'.

In the 80's he took photos of low-flying military jets [with tail #s] to help avoid collisions with the NP helicopters. 1981 he recd' an Outstanding Performance Award. Being on the ridge of the Sierras was amazing to see the contrasting forests to the west & desert to the east. In '79 his dad retired, spent a week with him in the back country, then took a trip to AK with his wife & died of a stroke. He took care of his mom over the winter before she died of cancer in '93. He then had an affair with another ranger that lasted a year. He was caught by his wife's best friend at a concert. Judi's mom died in '95 & he was not very sympathetic.

Randy started the '96 season with divorce papers in his pack. He got to the point that he didn't like who he saw in the mirror. On 24Jul96 it was discovered Randy had not checked in in the last 4 days & a search & rescue [SAR] began. It was based at his summer camp at Bench Lake [on the PCT]. After 7 days the size of the SAR was reduced from nearly 100 & it was called off after 10 days. Not only could they not find him, they could even find any clues.

Five years later, a CCC member came upon a boot [with foot skeleton inside] & backpack at a waterfall near Window Peak Lake. His supervisor reported it to chief ranger Bird & detective DeLaCruz who went to the site & found his radio & the rest of his remains. His wife was given the \$100,000 Public Safety Officer's Benefit.

With his mind on other things, he must have fallen through a snow bridge & drowned under ice downstream. The snowpack in that remote area hid his body for years.

Books: Yosemite Wildflower Trails; The 4 Seasons of Yosemite & Remembering Yosemite (Dana Morgenson); The Basic Photography Series (Ansel Adams); I Heard the Owl Call My Name

Quotes: "Everything has its beauty, but not everyone sees it." (Confucius); "Why does a wildflower exist? Because the universe would not be complete without it. (RM)

Links: www.messagefromthemountains.net www.robiningraham.com