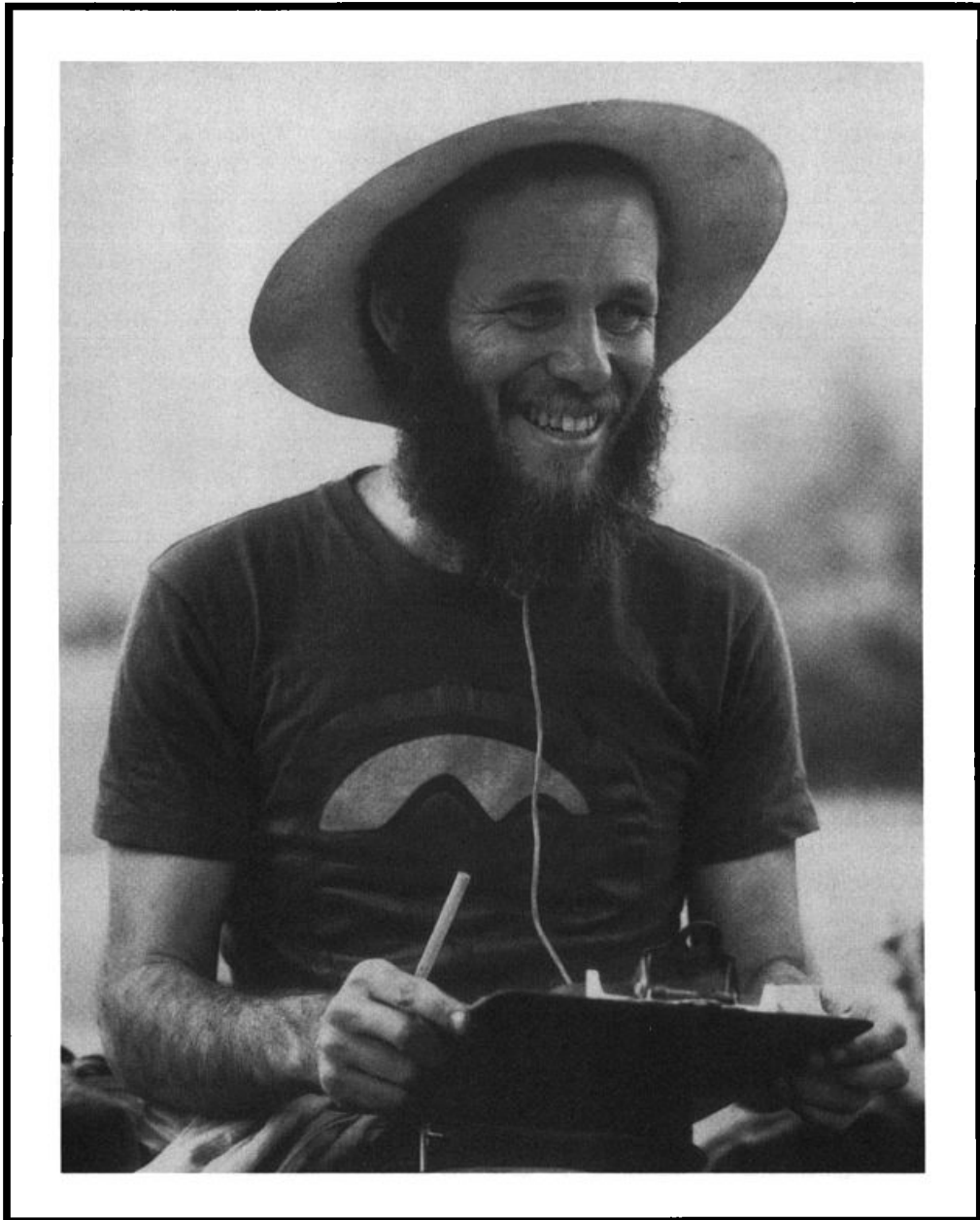


A tribute to Dave Gaines

Dave DeSante

David Gaines, environmental leader and founder of the Mono Lake Committee, died January 11, 1988 in an automobile accident.



“The birds and animals, trees and grasses, rocks, water and wind are our allies. They awaken our senses, rouse our passions, renew our spirits and fill us with vision, courage and joy We are Mono Lake.”

—Dave Gaines

DAVID GAINES, THE FOUNDER, spokesperson, and driving force of the Mono Lake Committee was recognized even before his tragic death as one of the country's greatest and most effective environmentalists. To those who knew him well, however, Dave was so much more. He was a father of unparalleled dedication; a teacher of the gentlest and humblest manner; a naturalist of broadest knowledge and experience; a musician and developing composer of phenomenal talent; a writer of unsurpassed clarity and eloquence.

Dave was a tireless worker for the environment, and although his efforts were concentrated on the Herculean task of defending an initially little-known lake east of the Sierra against the ravages of a rich and powerful utility company, his efforts did not stop with Mono Lake. Rather, his work and writings were directed toward preserving water resources and riparian ecosystems everywhere.

Dave's effectiveness as an environmentalist stemmed from a special blending of two qualities: his careful scientific mind and his extraordinary vision. Dave's scientific works were primarily concerned with birds and included his MS work on the status of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo in California, *Birds of Yolo* (a county in central California), *Birds of the Yosemite Sierra*, and his recently published, *Birds of Yosemite and the East Slope* (which he in fact never saw).

While Dave's scientific work respected well the rigors and limits of scientific thinking, his vision was boundless. His environmental writing always carried the hope and the promise of his vision, his dream. As he wrote in his final Mono Lake Newsletter, "Our state's largest, most powerful city may yet choose to respect the beauty and ecological well-being of a distant watershed. . . . Los Angeles may lead the country toward an urban future in harmony and balance with the rest of the planet. . . . Imagine a citizenry that value clear air more than new automobiles; know and respect where food, water and energy came from; husband and recycle water, energy and other resources. . . . Of course I'm dreaming. . . . But dreams and visions are counterpoint to laws and lawsuits. Without them, nothing will ever change."

Dave's greatest gift, however, may have been his profound spirituality. In his work to save Mono Lake, he characteristically went beyond words and numbers, beyond facts and figures, to include deeply rooted spiritual values. As he wrote in the autumn 1987 Mono Lake Newsletter, "We need to see the lake with our hearts as well as our minds, to let it speak to us of where we have come and where we are going, of three-and-a-half billion years of shared evolutionary travel, of our place on this planet. While facts are important, we need to feel as well as to know."

Dave's spirituality came from his intimate knowledge and deep love for the Earth. It came from the time he spent walking Mono's shores and sagebrush flats, from the time he spent hiking the high country of the Sierra. It came from personal contact with the beauty and mystery of nature—from the play of light on the mosquito's wing, from the delicate beauty and scent of the Sierran sky pilot, from the fierce determination in the Goshawk's eye. It filled him with the wisdom to know what must be done and the courage to carry it through. It made him one of Earth Mother's strongest warriors.

But Dave had another quality as well. He knew that the way of the true warrior is ultimately the way of the peacemaker. Dave's gentle manner and soft persuasive voice always served to lessen strife, to encourage communication, to disperse polarities, to bring peace. Truly, Dave's life was dedicated to peace—peace among his fellow human beings, peace between humans and their Earth. It was significant that Dave died while returning from a meeting of the Eastern Sierra Coalition for Peace.

The spirit of Dave Gaines has not and will not die. Rather, it has been multiplied and infused into those of us who understand his deepest yet simplest message—the message with which he almost always closed his correspondence—"Peace With Earth."