

## HubPages Interview of Richard F. Fleck (aka Juneaukid) by Dolores Monet

### 1) Please introduce us to the real Richard Fleck (aka Juneaukid) on HubPages.

I am originally a Pennsylvanian, born in Philadelphia and raised in Wernersville, PA (near Reading) until the age of 5 when my family and I moved to Princeton, New Jersey where my father managed Parnassus Bookshop from 1942 to 1948 or so. (See my hubs “*Memories of Parnassus Bookshop*,” and “*Further Memories of Parnassus Bookshop*.”)

After graduating from Princeton High School in 1955, I went to Rutgers University to graduate in 1959 with a B.A. in French and a minor in biological science which got me a job as a seasonal park ranger naturalist in Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado. I conducted hiking tours in both English and French up Specimen Mountain and other places. The great Rocky Mountains hooked me for life with their alpine sunflowers blowing in the wind along with glistening snowfields under a bright sun.

After graduate school at Colorado State University (M.A. in English, 1962) and later at The University of New Mexico (Ph.D in English, 1970) and my marriage to Irish-born Maura in 1963, I took a teaching position at the University of Wyoming where I managed to combine the teaching of literature with the appreciation of the natural world by conducting some outdoor classes. (See my hub “*Teaching Momaday’s The Way to Rainy Mountain Under Open Prairie Skies*”).

There was nothing more enjoyable for me than to take my wife and our three children on prairie walks in all four seasons. Springtime was short in Laramie as we had spring snowstorms as late as June. How did I choose “Juneaukid” as a name for HubPages? I went to Alaska in 1986 to hike the coastal range and to experience coastal fiords aboard a fishing boat. Needless to say, the Mendenhall glacier, the rainy sitka spruce forests, and the flight over the Juneau Icefields forcefully grabbed my attention. I did this in order to write the introduction to a paperback edition of S.H. Young’s *Alaska Days with John Muir* (Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 1990).

### 2) Tell us how you came to be interested in creative writing.

I started writing in grade school, and with the encouragement of my teachers, I published my first article at age 15 in *Junior Natural History Magazine* of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. I caught the writing fever and wrote about the outdoors from then until now and published articles in *National Parks Magazine*, *Sierra*, *Wilderness*, *The Snowy Egret*, and *New England Galaxy*.

I took sabbatical leave from the University of Wyoming to go to Ireland (1972-73) to research the influence of Thoreau on the Irish Easter Uprising of 1916. There, I became interested in writing fiction and took three years or so to write my first novel about IRA rebels called *Clearing of the Mist* (Dustbooks, 1979 and reissued by Domhain Books, 2000). The writing bug kept attacking me until I wrote a second novel about prehistoric Ireland and the building of Newgrange or Bru na Boinne 5,000 years ago. I called it *Spirit Mound: A Novel of Ancient Ireland* (PublishAmerica, 2005).

3) What brought you to HubPages and what do you hope to accomplish here?

In my quasi-retirement, I came to HubPages since book publishers had tighter and tighter budgets during this ongoing recession. I hardly wanted to give up writing because of a recession, so I tried HubPages and soon became hooked by thoroughly enjoying the work of my fans and writing (now in my seventies) but *not* at breakneck speed. I hope to gain an online recognition.

4) How did a New Jersey boy come to settle in the American West?

As a New Jersey boy, I delighted in the natural features of that state, from Cape May to High Point and from the Delaware Water Gap to Long Beach Island Preserve. I remember well taking a plant ecology course at Rutgers and our going on a field trip to the Pine Barrens with one area of miniature pines restricted in their growth by a heavy concentration of nickel in the soil. What a sight to see a dwarf forest stretching for miles!

As I before mentioned, my first job after graduating from Rutgers was as a park ranger naturalist in Rocky Mountain National Park. Can you imagine the impact of being stationed at Rock Cut on Trail Ridge Road at 12,200 feet after four years in New Brunswick, New Jersey?

5) I see that you've written poetry for *Climbing Magazine* as well as published a collection of essays on mountaineering (*Breaking Through the Clouds*; Pruett, 2005). Please tell us a bit about your climbing experiences.

The most remarkable mountaineering experiences for me are mostly recorded in *Breaking Through the Clouds*. But let me reiterate. We climbed Longs Peak (14,255 feet) by night back in July, 1960. As a 22 year old, I had far more energy than I do at 73 (though I climbed a "fourteener" just 5 years ago). Other rangers and I, on our day off, sprang through the forest up to tree-line in a matter of two hours to arrive at the Boulder Field at midnight. A full moon lit up the rocks and snowfields of Longs Peak.

After a rest, we climbed up to Chasm View overhanging Chasm Lake 2,000 feet below. *No vertigo* did we suffer, all in our twenties. But as we approached the cables route, the full moon was gradually extinguished by a total eclipse! Where

the heck are the cables? Struggling ever upward through narrow chimneys, we at last found the cables and proceeded to an upper ledge just below the summit. At this point we began to tire (no sleep that night, of course).

Plodding ever so slowly above 14,000 feet, we at last stood atop Longs Peak at 4 a.m. to await sunrise. Then all of us dozed off for forty winks on flat rocks in chilly 28 degree air. We awakened as the sun bobbed up over the prairies of eastern Colorado, and to our surprise, we experienced the *Brocken Specter*. During these few moments, the shadow of Longs Peak raced westward at the speed of rotation of our planet. Phenomenal to say the least!

6) Your travel writing is so beautiful. You are able to take your reader to places that you have visited. Have you ever written about your travels professionally?

Yes, I have written much about living in Japan (while teaching at Osaka University), in Ireland (while on sabbatical leave), in Italy (while teaching at the University of Bologna). My travel essays and poems have appeared in *The Boston Review*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Mainichi Daily News* (Japan), *Poetry Nippon* and in the form of introductions to trade paperback editions of Henry Thoreau, John Muir, and John Burroughs for a number of university presses and even for a Harper Perennial Classic edition of Thoreau's *The Maine Woods*.

7) What inspired you to become so engrossed in the outdoor life?

As I have already mentioned, I minored in biological science at Rutgers and began hiking and camping as a youngster in New Jersey. But mostly, my experiences of guiding people on all-day in "nature hikes" in Rocky Mountain National Park put the icing on the cake.

8) As a published, professional writer, do you have any tips for people who are interested in writing for commercial publications (real magazines)?

My advice as a writer to other hubbers would be to write, write, write after you have read, read, read great writers of the present and of ages past. It is important for you to get feedback from other writers (and non-writers) by giving readings at local coffee houses, public libraries, and, if possible, on college campuses.

Before you submit an essay to something like "The Home Forum" of *The Christian Science Monitor*, go over it with a fine-toothed comb. Read it aloud. Read it silently again and again. Get rid of useless verbiage. Get to the point. Follow Hemingway's advice of writing about what you truly know. Write about what is dear to you, even if it is something as simple as fiddleheads springing out of the ground in April to become full-fledged ferns in summer. Above all, have

**patience! Expect rejections. Don't let them get you down. Bounce back with full vigor and hope for "a little bit of luck."**