



## **The Mythology of the**

### **Great Grump**

In our community, one of the most important things the Old Timers wanted to communicate and pass forward was, that although many of them lived extremely difficult and desperately dangerous lives underground and above ground serving the never-unionized mines at the north end of the Gunnison Valley, they were also courageous, fun-loving and rebellious.

In the old countries, including Slovenia and Croatia, folks created wild, sacrificial effigies, a send-up of a local bigwig, filled with grievances, often about the ruling class. The effigy was tried and sentenced, banished, hanged, and then for extra good measure, burned.

The Old Timers spoke of this as a practice conducted in the autumn, during a time called “Vinotok,” a word translated from Slovenian meaning “the celebration of the season when the grapes were turned into wine.” In Crested Butte, many of the European cultures competed to see who had laid down the best Zinfandel from the passing year.

This rowdy festival of feasting, generosity of spirit, polka and folk dancing, and drinking up all of the zinfandel led to the hanging and burning of the Boss Man effigy. It was one of the few revolutionary statements the working people, ruled by the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company, could make, hopefully without being fired. This celebration was also a seasonal reminder that this was the last time of abundance before the first snows and the coming of the long, hard winter. It was a time to remember the profound importance of community commitment to each other and the sharing of great generosity of spirit.

For us, today, the Grump symbolizes all we want to rid ourselves of for the coming year. In its creation are all the angers, resentments, frustrations and disappointments of the past ranging from the personal to the political. Indeed, it is full of the community’s “grumps”--slips of paper with an individual’s pains they want to get rid of--and put into the communal Grump Box. The Great Grump itself is then stuffed with these boxes. It is everything that does not serve us.

In the Trial of the Grump, as the battle between the primordial Earth Dragon and the technocratic Sir Hapless the Knight wages on, it is decided a sacrifice must be made in order that the Green Man and the Red Lady may live, and a luscious and abundant future may prevail. It is decided through a “trial” that the Grump will become that sacrifice and it is paraded to the Fire Circle to be burned, and all the community’s woes collectively transformed, to indeed make way for a brighter, and--as local legend has it--snowier year ahead.



## Poem for the Great Grump

Effigy does not describe  
your revolutionary statement  
nor your wild sacrificial art.  
Constructed afresh each year  
to transport grievances.

By ash  
& flame

Once upon a time in this very town the old timers told of tradition. Once a year the local representative of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company would lock his door & head to bed before sundown. For in the village where Croatian and Slovenian decedents lived the common folk had built a figure of protest, a character to be tried in place of the ruling class. One night a year they declared independence from a system rooted in bias. A message by bonfire from the working people to the boss, that despite the darkness they endure & the hardships they survive. The people are still courageous, exuberant & rebellious.

You are a seasonal reminder  
united we hold power & we are untamable.

You are a seasonal reminder  
times of abundance do not last & winter is long

Envoke      the      profound      importance of      community