

How much? Elmira barber shop battles inflation with cuts, conversation for only \$2

Story and photo
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Of the Emerald

The day of the two-bit haircut is long since gone, along with the Model A and Prohibition. Today a haircut will run you anywhere from \$3.50 for the now fading white-wall-look to \$10 for a contemporary style at most establishments.

But in Elmira you can still get a "straight" haircut for just \$2. TWO DOLLARS!

Elmira is a small country community about 12 miles west of Eugene, near Veneta. Rex Hisler, who operates the Elmira barber shop — which boasts a sign in front reading "Haircuts-\$2 — claims his barber parlor is "the working man's friend and the fighter of inflation."

The Elmira barber shop has been in the Hisler family for about 15 years. Rex and his brother Clay operate the two-chair establishment. "Clay is building trailers now, but when I go up to Portland to go to chiropractic school he will run the shop again," Rex explained. A cousin of the brothers, Kenny Armstrong, came out from Idaho to clip hair for four years before returning to Twin Falls to open his own shop.

The old drab structure housing the barber parlor for so many years didn't always serve this function. At different times it has been a candy store, a dentist's office and a post office. The interior of the shop is small with no unnecessary adornments. Behind the two barber chairs, an old one and a newer model, are two mirrors and a shelf containing a minimum amount of tonics.

How different is this shop's functional austerity from the al-

most ostentatious lavishness displayed by some hair-styling establishments. One is assured upon entering this barber shop that a haircut is the order of business here.

This morning there are four older men occupying the folding chairs, waiting and conversing while Rex works quickly. Not too quickly to keep him out of the conversation, however. This is a good place to come and enjoy conversation with others. No one seems hurried or impatient.

The conversation leads to Rex who wasn't sure if Roland was going to sell his sheep, but he was fairly sure that marijuana wasn't addicting, as one old gentleman suggested it was.

Who would think that a barber shop in a community the size of Elmira could be busy? In a three-hour period on this Tuesday morning Rex removed hair from 12 different heads. On a typical day he is busy in the morning with retired men who come in for a trim until the usual lull around noon. Then, after lunch, working men come in for their haircut, often with reluctant sons.

Is business as good as it appears to be? "Well considering overhead and social security, and of course no benefits, you don't make that much. I don't know how the union shops make it," Rex replied. Why the low price? "I like to work in volume. It keeps me busy and time goes by fast," he said.

At the Elmira barber shop you can also get a shave for \$2. Rex says he loses money on them, though. Since few people want a shave he is out of practice and thus cannot do it quickly enough to make it worthwhile. One man who was getting his hair trimmed said,



Rex Hisler claims his two-chair operation with its \$2 haircuts is the "working man's friend."

"Bigshots get shaves, but there aren't any of them around here." Here the conversation turned toward bigshots like Johnny Carson who gets his "hair cut everyday at \$25 a shot," according to one old timer.

It's not only older men who get their haircuts here. One young father brought his little boy in for a trim. After tensely awaiting the outcome of the haircut with inter-

mittant "Daddy, I'm done" pleas for release, he was rewarded with a piece of bubble gum for his good behavior. The father, however, didn't get any gum for his good behavior, but for \$2 what do you expect?

The sign on the door says closed on Saturday and Monday. When asked if he were open on Sunday, Rex said it was against

the law for a barber shop to be open on the Sabbath. "That law goes back to when the old temperance gals didn't want barber-shops or taverns open on Sundays in fear of dirty stories being told and men chewing chaw."

No chaw was chewed today, though a few dirty stories were told. Today is Tuesday though, so it must have been okay.

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Artisan

He also does volunteer maintenance work for the YMCA Pre-School, Scarborough Fair and the Unitarian Church.

He supplies day care centers around town with his child-sized tables and chairs, charging minimal rates of \$2 or \$3 per chair. Centers that use furniture by Walden include Child Care Inc., YMCA Pre-School, the University's Child Care and Development Center, Playland Day Nursery and the Community Coordinated Child-Care Council.

When confronted with the amount of volunteer maintenance work he takes care of around town, Walden says simply, "It hurts my conscience to see a place get dilapidated." Similarly he shrugs off his liking for children's furniture. "It's my hobby. I want something to do to keep me busy," he says.

At the Saturday Market, he sells his miniature furniture for about a third of what similar items would cost in a store. Tables at \$10 a piece are the highest priced. Rocking chairs at \$5, are mid-range.

But the low prices are just part of the attraction. All his furniture is made from recycled, salvaged material and none of it is perfectly finished. One chair may have different colors of paint showing here

and there. Another may have a seat made from old carpet scraps.

Walden peers through his bifocals at a rocking chair and identifies the source of every piece of wood in it.

"Those hardwood rockers come from motorcycle packing crates. I made the legs and back from log ends I get from the mill. Yeah, I split those up and use them, too. And the seat, I think that's part of the haul I made from that new parade structure when they were building that."

To Walden, saving money by using recycled material is not the main consideration.

"The point is," he explains, "you kind of set a challenge for yourself. When you go to do something, you say, 'Can I make this out of recycled material?'"

Walden was born in Eugene, but his family moved to a small town in northern Montana when he was five. His sister, Clita Haight, remembers hard times when the family moved from Montana during the Dust Bowl period and resettled in Eugene just a few years before the Depression.

"It was part of us to be saving," she says. "For instance, our mother made most of my clothes and all of Bob's clothing out of old...you know, it was made-over clothing. We didn't think of it as made-over clothing. It was something new when it came to us."

Now when Walden breathes new life into other people's discarded, it is with the empathy of a man who was once an outcast from society himself.

When the United States entered the war, he was of draft age, but the patriotic fervor which took hold of so many young men at the time, didn't grab Walden. He couldn't picture himself picking up a gun to kill another man. His convictions had an unsettling effect on his family and the community.

"Nowadays, it's an entirely different set-up," says his sister, who presently lives in Washington. "But at that time you were considered really unpatriotic and really

an outsider. You were a very unusual person who objected like that."

Haight says that if Walden had been allowed to channel his energies into some peaceful effort, it could have saved the family a lot of heartache. As it was though, his conscientious objector status was refused on the grounds that he didn't have a strong church affiliation. When the draft induction notice came he couldn't force himself to report for duty. As a consequence, he had a nervous breakdown.

The experience cost him a great deal of his life. He spent the next 15 years in and out of mental institutions in Oregon and Washington. By 1960 he was back at home living with his parents but still had to go through a long period of readjustment. Gradually, he started to help with the family's rental business, taking care of maintenance and repairs.

He saved the surplus material from each of his maintenance jobs and started making coffee tables and end tables out of the salvage. He also made small stools and chairs for the children in the neighborhood. One day, he took a couple of these pieces to the Saturday Market. They were grabbed up immediately. Walden had an outlet for his creations.

Over the last few years he has found a permanent niche for himself in the community building miniature tables, stools and chairs. Their various parts once destined to be refuse, these well-built pieces of furniture will be used and loved by children for many years to come.

Perhaps the greatest praise for Walden's work to date comes from a recent YMCA Pre-School Newsletter: "Bob's art or his craft just cannot be surpassed. The beauty and durability of his craftsmanship has been a blessing beyond words to our school. The sounds within his workshop at this moment may resound of things to come, but there are no words to sound the depth of our appreciation for this man's ongoing gift to the children."

The Great Invocation

From the point of Light within the Mind of God
Let light stream forth into the minds of men.
Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love within the Heart of God
Let love stream forth into the hearts of men.
May Christ return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known
Let purpose guide the little wills of men —
The purpose which the Masters know and serve.

From the centre which we call the race of men
Let the Plan of Love and Light work out.
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth.

Wednesday, June 1st, 1977 is WORLD INVOCATION DAY. We invite you to "link in thought" with millions of men & women of Goodwill everywhere, who use The Great Invocation every day of the year, in over 60 languages. This Mantram belongs to no single group, organisation or sect. It helps to unite Humanity, spread Goodwill, and bring about Right Human Relations.

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