

VOICES

Loss of a lifesaver leaves a hole in our hearts

By **MELANIE MOONEY**

Special to The Observer

A beloved member of our family died today.

I am shocked at how much pain I feel.

My husband and I are sitting in our family room crying and staring at his empty bed with disbelief.

Until we adopted Logan, I didn't understand how much a person could love a dog.

Logan was 10 years old but had only been part of our family for three years. Two weeks ago, he was healthy, strong, and walking the grandchildren all over the neighborhood. A week later, Logan started having seizures, and our vet said he wouldn't recover.

My husband and I had to lift our "Big Boy" into the car to go to the animal hospital. I signed the papers, paid the fee, hugged Logan and sat next to him on the carpet. Suddenly, my husband stood up and said, "I can't do this today; we'll take him home to see if he can get better."

I could not believe it! We had talked about putting Logan down the night before and had agreed that we didn't want him to suffer more seizures. Logan couldn't stand up without swaying. His back end would fall, and then he'd go down also.

What was my husband thinking?

So, we took him home. I drove because my husband was crying. We carried him into the house and tucked him into his bed in the family room. I went into the dining room, closed the door and phoned my sister. I told her how angry I was with my husband, how I thought we'd made up our minds and that I'd been ready.

All she said was, "Be respectful of his sorrow. He also loves Logan and doesn't want to lose him. Give them both a couple more days together."

So, I did. My husband and I cuddled Logan, helped him outside, and tucked him

ANYONE CAN WRITE

Nearly 40 years in the business have taught me that readers are bombarded and overwhelmed with facts. What we long for, though, is meaning and a connection at a deeper and more universal level.

And that's why The Observer will be running, from time to time, stories from students who are in my writing class, which I've been teaching for the past 10 years in Portland.

I take great satisfaction in helping so-called nonwriters find and write stories from their lives and experiences. They walk into my room believing they don't have what it takes to be a writer. I remind them if they follow their hearts, they will discover they are storytellers.

As we all are at our core.

Some of these stories have nothing to do with La Grande or Union County. They do, however, have everything to do with life.

If you are interested in contacting me to tell me your story, I'd like to hear from you.

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Tom Hallman Jr. is a Pulitzer Prize-winning feature writer for The Oregonian. He's also a writing coach and has an affinity for Union County.

in at night. I slept on the downstairs couch with Logan in his doggy bed on the floor next to me. I kept my hand on his back, patting him whenever he whined.

Before I went to bed that first night, I sat up thinking about the day Logan had joined our family. He had jumped out of the dog rescue van and stretched himself out. I had found him on the website Rescueme.org. The small face picture and description seemed perfect.

My granddaughters and I had gasped when we first saw him. The dog in front of us was not the 25-pound Australian Shepherd we'd driven 100 miles to claim. Instead, he was a large, 60-pound Red Meryl with liver-colored spots all over him. This animal did not look like the doggy in the window of my computer screen.

Logan was friendly with the girls and attentive to the handler. The girls said we should adopt him.

After our granddaughters went home, my husband asked if our revolving grandchildren's door could swing open again to admit Tyler. Since Tyler has Down syndrome, he requires a lot of supervision. Since Don is 82, I'm the one who ends up chasing Tyler.

I said, "No, we have a new dog and don't know his history with small children." But giving respite for his son and daughter-in-law won out.

Although Logan wasn't the dog we'd requested, he turned out to be the dog we needed.

On Tyler and Logan's first afternoon together, they allowed us to dress them up in red, white, and blue colors for the annual July 4th neighborhood parade. Once we got down to the common area near the marina, Tyler did a runner and tore off down the gravel path toward the Columbia River. I started after him when pain engulfed my bad knee.

I looked down at our new dog, leashed firmly to my husband's hand. I undid the leash and commanded, "Logan, get Tyler." The dog straightened up, looked me in the eyes, followed my pointing finger, and took off.

Logan circled Tyler, brought him to a halt and herded him back to my side. As our new dog sat at attention by my feet, I swear he grinned up at me. The neighbors went crazy. They clapped and laughed at Logan's skillful retrieval.

Don looked at me and said, "I wasn't

crazy about this dog when you brought him home yesterday; however, I think I like him already."

So, we kept him, and then we saved him.

While we needed Logan to keep us company in our old age, it turned out that Logan also needed us. Shortly after his arrival, I took him in for a quick physical exam. Our veterinarian examined Logan, looked at me with concern, and said, "This dog has an unusual condition and requires surgery for cancer." It was a rare surgery, and it took our vet a week to find technical information about how to do the procedure. He discovered it in a British veterinarian journal.

Logan recovered completely.

Then Logan saved my husband's life by barking and alerting me to a life-threatening emergency. Logan doesn't usually bark, so his sudden noisy woofs made me run to my husband's side and call an ambulance.

When I had a knee replacement last year, my neighbor walked Logan each day. At other times Logan would walk himself. Several times a day, he'd jump up, look around for his large orange bone, and happily run figure-eight laps around the inside of our house. If we clapped our hands, Logan would straighten up and run faster. He'd prance past us with his bone dangling out of his mouth, looking like Humphrey Bogart in a late-night movie with a cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth. We adored our "Big Boy."

Over the years, I've learned that pets are somewhat like leaves on a tree. They come for a season to add color and texture to the canopy of life. They leave an empty space in the air around us when they leave.

Logan saved a life while he was with us. He kept us occupied and entertained during the extended shutdown of the COVID-19 pandemic.

After our hearts recover, we may once again search for a fantastic old dog to love us during the coming winters of our lives.

Local artist earns statewide recognition

Susan Murrell receives fellowship from Oregon Arts Commission

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**

The Observer

LA GRANDE — For hardworking local artists, recognition is sometimes few and far between.

In the case of Susan Murrell, the La Grande based artist recently earned acknowledgment for her recent work on a statewide level. The Eastern Oregon University art professor was one of 10 visual artists recognized by the Oregon Arts Commission, receiving a \$5,000 fellowship.

"It's definitely an honor," Murrell said. "I'm in great company with my fellow cohort of 2022. It's nice to be selected and honored by the selection committee."

Murrell earned the fellowship primarily for her work last year on "if water had its way," an exhibit focused on the idea of water serving as a symbol of birth, life and death. It also pointed out the role of human beings as the landscape shifts in the midst of climate change.

The fellowship review process involved a panel of arts professionals from across Oregon who took into account outstanding talent, demonstrated ability and commitment to the creation of new works. This year's program received 103 applications.

"Sometimes it can feel like you're working really hard and kind of spinning your wheels," Murrell said. "Every once in a while when something like this comes through and you realize that you've gained the respect of your peers, it is very satisfying."

The fellowship funding serves as a vote of confidence from the Oregon Arts Commission, giving Murrell an open door for further projects.

The artist, who has lived in La Grande for the past 12 years, has sev-

MURRELL FEATURED IN FREE ONLINE TALK

Susan Murrell is set to host an open discussion about her work in the Tuesday, March 15, Brown Bag hosted by the Josephy Center, Joseph, and held online on noon.

Learn more and access the link at www.josephy.org/event/virtual-brown-bag-with-susan-murrell.

eral projects in the works. Murrell has an upcoming group exhibition in Portland with Sator Projects in June and a solo project with Carnation Contemporary in Portland. She also has a forthcoming show at the Whatcom Museum in Bellingham, Washington.

"Getting support and funding like this will help me think about more ambitious projects and take creative risks for my next steps, without necessarily having to secure funding or think about the commercial implications," Murrell said.

She noted that her projects often encapsulate a large space, which can be difficult in terms of funding.

"My work is larger in terms of square footage and is not super commercial work. It's not the type of stuff that people hang in their living room," she said. "It's a lot more experimental, so an award like this could really help put things together for me."

In addition to her individual artistic endeavors, Murrell is a full-time art professor at Eastern Oregon University. Her classes recently displayed a series of pieces at Cook Memorial Library, which is on display through March 29.

Murrell noted that the balance of teaching and focusing on individual work can be a challenge, but that the schedule of semesters is often beneficial. She is able to work on larger pieces during the summer months and winter break, while working from home on a smaller scale during the school year. As a mentor to aspiring artists, Murrell's experience in the field is often a helpful tool.

"Being an artist that is active and producing work I think is definitely a benefit to my students in that they



Mario Gallucci/Contributed photo

Susan Murrell's "If water had its way" stands on display in the spring of 2021. Murrell, an art professor at Eastern Oregon University, was recently recognized for her work with a \$5,000 fellowship from the Oregon Arts Commission.

see me being honest about the struggles and accomplishments," she said. "I'm in it with them, so they get to really see how all that is working, whether it is professional practices or creative struggles."

Murrell was the only artist selected out of the Eastern Oregon region for a 2022 Oregon Arts Commission fellowship. With

added funding secured, she will have the opportunity to continue creating unique pieces in the coming years.

"I think that it's great for people to know that there are contemporary art practices out here and that there are people who are practicing their craft and working in various ways," Murrell said. "It also helps

other people realize that, perhaps, they could take a second look at your art

practice and that maybe you're doing something important."

Helen B. (Forrest) Cochrane

March 16, 1924 - February 19, 2022

Helen Cochrane, 98, died Saturday, February 19, 2022, in La Grande. A celebration of her life will be announced in the spring by Daniels-Knopp Funeral, Cremation & Life Celebration Center of La Grande. Private interment will be at the Grandview Cemetery.

Helen Berniece was born on March 16, 1924, in Snyder, Colorado, the daughter of Fern and Mary (Miller) Forrest. She started her education in Snyder before she moved to Salinas, California, where Helen graduated from high school with the class of 1942. The following Sept. 10 she married James "Jim" Cochrane at Fort Ord. They were married for 55 years prior to his death in 1997.

Helen was primarily a homemaker and mother but she was a very accomplished seamstress, sewing before there were even patterns. She worked for Craig's Cleaners and when her son Patrick was stationed in Hawaii, she would visit once a year and spend time tailoring uniforms for the soldiers under his command. Helen had a very active life in addition to her home and sewing. She held life memberships in both the Order of Eastern Star and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary. She was a member of the Pythian Sisters and the Umbrella Girls. She loved to dance and was a member of the Star Promenaders and later enjoyed dancing at the senior center, especially to the music of the live bands.

Surviving relatives include her children and their spouses, Louise and Gary Jones of Chubbuck, Idaho, and Arizona, Robert of Florida, and Patrick and Victoria of La Grande; 10 grandchildren; 16 great-grandchildren and six great-great-grandchildren; other relatives and friends.

She was preceded in death by her husband; a son, Michael; her parents and siblings; and a grandson.



Jeffery L. Hardy

August 25, 1955 - March 6, 2022

Jeffery "Jeff" Lewis Hardy, 66, of Elgin, passed away on Sunday, March 6, 2022, at his residence. A memorial service will be held at a later time.

Jeff was born on Aug. 25, 1955, in La Grande, Oregon, to Albertus and Eloine (Evers) Hardy. He was a lifelong resident of Cricket Flat and graduated from Elgin High School in 1973.

Jeff was a self-employed rancher/farmer and also worked for other farmers in the area. He enjoyed the outdoors, hunting, long drives, operating big equipment, and especially enjoyed driving the D6 Cat he recently acquired. Jeff was a member of the NRA.

Jeff is survived by his brothers, Don Hardy, David Hardy and Steven Hardy, all of Elgin; sister, Alice Hardy, of Elgin; aunt, Necia DeWitt of Vernonia, Oregon; two nieces and nephews; two great-nieces and great-nephews; and numerous cousins. He was preceded in death by his parents, Albertus and Eloine Hardy.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to a charity of your choice.

Online condolences may be made to the family at www.lovelandfuneralchapel.com.

