

People & Places

Rancher engages through storytelling

Diane Josephy Peavey shares the story of rural life through her writing

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

CAREY, Idaho — There's a lot of emphasis today on the need for agriculture to share with the broader public how it grows food, but Diane Josephy Peavey was doing it long before "tell your story" was a catch phrase.

Her own story — an evolution from city girl to rancher, writer and sheep industry advocate — is an interesting narrative that took her from a Washington, D.C. and New York City childhood to the open landscapes of Idaho ranching country.

Peavey left the East Coast to attend college in California, spending summers at a farm her father bought in the Wallowa Mountains of north-eastern Oregon as a base for his research on the Nez Perce Tribe.

After college, she worked two years at the U.S. Pavilion at the World's Fair in New York and spent a year in Spain before returning to the U.S. to work for Time magazine as assistant news editor.

The years following took her to San Francisco, where she worked with inner city youth, and to Capitol Hill, where she worked as a congressional staffer, in President Richard Nixon's media program — under Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney — and at the Interior Department under then-Secretary Cecil Andrus, a former Idaho governor.

But it was her four years in Alaska that set the stage for her rural storytelling and advocacy of those who steward natural resources.

For the first time, she encountered people whose entire lives were connected to the land, who depended on the environment.

"What I really came to understand was the passion people had for the land, their care for the land ... so tied to place and community and family," she said.

She went to Alaska in the early 1970s after her first marriage broke up, wanting to learn everything she could about the state.

"It was an interesting time to be there. The pipeline was being built, it was a huge transition period for the Alaskan people," she said.

Her first job was doing demographic surveys with research funding from the federal government. She then went to work for the governor,



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Sheep rancher and writer Diane Josephy Peavey reflects on life on the ranch while sitting on the porch of the 100-year-old cabin she and her husband, John, call home north of Carey, Idaho, on July 11.

engaging with Native Alaskans to develop public policy regarding Native land claims.

That work took her back to Washington, D.C., initially as a Senate staffer and then with the Interior Department to work on Alaskan lands issues with the Bureau of Land Management.

It was a great job, explaining the issues on Capitol Hill, but her tenure at Interior ended with the administration change when Ronald Reagan came into office, she said.

Fork in the road

Her intention was to return to Alaska and pursue personal interests, including writing. On the way, she visited her brother, who lived in Hailey, Idaho. While there, she met John Peavey, a local rancher and state senator, and the two hit it off from the start.

She decided to work on a short-term National Science Foundation project in Montana, and the two stayed in contact. When the project was finished and she was unsure of her next move, John invited her to spend the summer at his ranch, where she could write in solitude.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I finally took him up on it," she said.

Upon her arrival at Flat Top Ranch in the foothills of the Pioneer Mountains, she was struck by the incredible silence.

"It was like a welcoming hug. I didn't want to make a noise or move," she said.

The following summer, the two were married on the ranch, and a new chapter began in her life.

"I spent the first five years trying to figure out what I was doing here, why I was here ... how to be helpful. You're trying to figure out, Can you be something you've never been before?" she said.

She came to realize she

wasn't going to be "cowgirl of the year," roping, riding and castrating. But she could write about the people who did work the land and livestock, she said.

She started writing and compiled a collection of stories. In the early 1990s, she took those stories to National Public Radio in Boise and was told to take them home and record them. The effort earned her a weekly radio spot narrating her writings on ranch life.

"I was writing for a more urban audience, but who better — I didn't know anything 10 years ago," she said.

Her earliest writings were about the devastation of the farm crisis in the 1980s. Traveling the West on ranching business with John, she visited with ranchers and drove through small towns that had been boarded up and ag land that had gone to weeds.

People in rural America were frightened. Everything was changing. Third and fourth generations were losing the ranch. There was despair and a longing to retain that connection to land, place and family history. Overcoming is the story of ranching, but this time there was no "next year" for many people, she said.

"I wanted to tell the stories because it became clear to me the people who are not living these stories know nothing about us," she said.

They don't understand that people who know themselves best on the land are lost when that's taken away, she said.

Claiming the life

The writing and storytelling was also a way of making this place — the ranch, Idaho — her own. The farm depression hit Flat Top Ranch as well, and she wanted to be able to remember what she and John had on the ranch — and the fear of what they could lose, she said.

The radio spot wasn't just about her or raising awareness, it was also about giving a voice to ranchers and others in the rural community who were too busy to do it themselves, she said.

She wrote about many topics for the public radio spot, which was well received by urban and rural folks alike. The gig lasted 18 years, until Peavey started to feel as though she was repeating herself.

Storytelling was also the genesis of the Trailing of the Sheep, a now internationally recognized annual festival, which she and John co-founded.

Blaine County, home to many transplants, had wanted to build a bike path along a corridor that had been used for decades as a stock trail. Ranchers had no problem with the idea until the first year they trailed sheep along the new paved bike path.

The Peaveys' phone rang off the hook with complaints from residents wanting the sheep off "their" bike path.

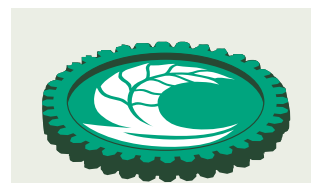
"John said, 'Let's invite them to help us walk them and keep the sheep off the path,'" and the festival was born, she said.

It started small with efforts by local chambers of commerce. Along the way, Peavey wanted to add stories — a collection of narratives by ranchers and herders telling the history of the area and ranching — and make it a folklife fair that showcases the area's cultural heritage.

Last year's festival drew 26,000 people from 36 states and eight countries, and this fall will mark the 20th year of the festival.

"What it is to me is how you share your life with people who don't know anything about it," she said.

There's been such growth in the Wood River Valley in Central Idaho. The festival helps



Western Innovator

Diane Josephy Peavey

Home: Carey, Idaho

Husband and partner: John Peavey, third-generation rancher and former Idaho senator

Business: Flat Top Sheep Co.; sheep and cattle; 25,000 private acres plus public grazing land

Writer: Former longtime weekly contributor to Idaho Public Radio; published in numerous magazines and western anthologies; author of "Bitterbrush Country: Living on the Edge of the Land," a collection of her radio essays.

Industry advocate: Co-founder of the Trailing of the Sheep Festival; American Lamb Board vice chairman; first director of the Idaho Rural Council

Education: Bachelor's degree in English, Scripps College; graduate work in journalism

Interesting note: Her father, Alvin Josephy Jr., was a World War II combat correspondent; a writer and editor for Time Magazine; a noted historian, author and government consultant on the Nez Perce Tribe and Native Americans; and the first chairman of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian

residents understand it's so beautiful because of the people who came before them, who protected and cared for open spaces. Without ranchers and a working landscape, it would be developed, she said.

"The people who live on the land have an intimacy with the landscape and a knowledge that newcomers don't. Without knowing those stories, we will miss out about why we love this place," she said.

The festival is also an opportunity to promote lamb, which is her mission as vice chair of the American Lamb Board. Lamb is served at festival venues and local restaurants and is the focus of cooking classes during the five-day event.

The festival is another part of Peavey's evolution to rancher, storyteller and rural advocate.

"I had a terrific life before I came here. But living on the ranch, I am a part of this. This is my story now," she said.

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We want to publish corrections to set the record straight.

Canola field in Eastern Washington plagued by larks

LIND, Wash. (AP) — A canola farmer in Adams County has been left without his whole crop thanks to hundreds of birds that have decided to use his field for a buffet.

J.R. Swinger told the Spokesman-Review that he first thought the horned larks were eating the seeds, but on second inspection they were snapping up the very tip of

the sprout, without which his canola plants can't grow.

Swinger said the sprout, called a cotyledon, only exists for a few days and once it grew slightly the birds didn't want to eat it anymore.

"We are looking at a two- or three-day window. Once the plant starts photosynthesizing, the birds aren't interested in it anymore," Swinger said. "They must really like

that tiny tip. I don't know what else is driving them."

Washington State University professor Bill Schillinger said he too has faced the lark issue and can't find a solution. While tending to canola research plots over the past 10 years, Schillinger said he's tried a variety of things to deter the determined birds including plastic owls, propane-powered cannons, garlic

oil and netting but nothing worked.

Schillinger has called canola farmers and experts in other parts of the country and they don't see the birds, leading him to believe it's a sites-specific problem. Swinger said he also thinks it's a local problem, that the birds have learned to feed on the canola and that they bring their offspring back to the field.

Even though Schillinger hadn't found a solution to the lark problem, he decided to submit a scientific paper that was published in Industrial Crops and Products earlier this year.

"Most of the time, I submit scientific papers based on years and years of research," Schillinger said. "I wrote this paper simply because it's an interesting problem."

Calendar

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July 22-July 24

California State Fair, 1600 Exposition Blvd., Sacramento, 916-263-FAIR, http://www.casatafair.org/

Friday, July 22

Idaho Water Resource Board meeting, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Best Western Edgewater Resort, 56 Bridge St., Sandpoint, Idaho. Website: idwr.idaho.gov/IWRB/

Columbia County Fair, 10 a.m.-11 p.m. Columbia County Fairgrounds, 58892 Saulser Road, St. Helens, Ore.

Saturday, July 23

Columbia County Fair, 10 a.m.-11 p.m. Columbia County Fairgrounds, 58892 Saulser Road, St. Helens, Ore.

Sunday, July 24

Columbia County Fair, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Columbia County Fairgrounds, 58892 Saulser Road, St. Helens, Ore.

Tuesday, July 26

FSPCA Preventive Controls for Human Food Course, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Yanke Family Research Cen-

ter, 220 E. Parkcenter Blvd., Boise, Idaho. The new FSMA regulation requires every processing facility to have a trained resource person or "Preventive Controls Qualified Individual" who has completed a specialized training course such as the one developed by the Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance (FSPCA) that is recognized by the FDA. This person will oversee the implementation of the facility's food safety plan and other key tasks. www.techhelp.org/events/279/fspcaboisejuly2016/

Wednesday, July 27

Fresno Food Expo, 8 a.m.-8 p.m., Fresno, Calif., Convention & Entertainment Center. http://www.fresnofoodexpo.com

Hood River County Fair, noon-11 p.m. Hood River County Fairgrounds, 3020 Wyeast Road, Hood River, Ore. Gates open at noon each day, carnival rides begin at 1 p.m. General admission is \$8 per adult Wednesday and Thursday, and \$10 per adult on Friday and Saturday. Children ages 6-12 (inclusive) are admitted for \$3 every day; children younger than 6 are admitted free. Season tickets are available (\$30 for adults, \$10 ages 6-12 inclusive). Fair parking is free.

FSPCA Preventive Controls for Human Food Course, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Yanke Family Research Center, 220 E. Parkcenter Blvd., Boise, Idaho. This is a continuation of Tuesday's course. www.techhelp.org/events/279/fspcaboisejuly2016/

Thursday, July 28

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