

TRENDS AND OBSERVATIONS

Life’s surprises

BY RAUNO PERTTU

Life’s surprises have a way of crashing into our best laid plans. I’m sure our current economic crisis has dented many plans and dreams. Life has few sure bets, and the sure bets tend to be unpleasant. For many years, my wife Jan and I talked about our plans to spend our retirement years in travel and adventure. Perhaps those plans will still materialize, but lately, life has given us our own share of surprises.

As perhaps the most challenging of these surprises, five years ago Jan was diagnosed with the initial stage of dementia, better known as Alzheimer’s disease. This was a shock for an active, intelligent, educated 53-year-old lady and our family.

Jan and I immediately investigated options with the Oregon Health Services University hospital (OHSU) in Portland to see what new or pending treatments might be available. We learned that the available treatments only moderately slow the progression of the disease. The researchers at OHSU told us that advanced, effective treatments were perhaps two to four years away, and they were participating in evaluating some of the most promising new drugs.

Jan promptly enrolled in a trial medication test being conducted by OHSU, which meant repeated drives to Portland, but we were ready to travel much farther if it meant the chance to fight the disease. Her first trial drug

turned out not to be as effective as hoped, similarly to several others that have been tested over the past years.

Today, there are new promising drugs being tested, but Jan wasn’t able to get into these tests. If any of these new research drugs turn out to be as effective as early indications suggest, they are expected to become publicly available in that always-shifting two to four years from today. If an effective treatment becomes available earlier elsewhere in the world, our motto is “Have suitcase—will travel.”

About a year before Jan was diagnosed, her mother died from Alzheimer’s disease. In helping her mother, we learned the difficulties resulting from the disease. In response to Jan’s concerns, her mother’s doctors assured us that the odds of Jan developing the disease were slim, and that a cure was in the near future. Unfortunately, life often ignores the experts.

While helping Jan’s mother, we agreed that Alzheimer’s is a slow eroding away that is worse than cancer. I learned the reality of that observation the summer before last, when I was diagnosed with early prostate cancer. I had the cancer removed by robotic nerve-saving surgery and no longer have to worry about that problem. Alzheimer’s doesn’t yet allow the same option.

Over these past five years, Jan has re-taught me that a gentle, warm,

fun-loving personality is compatible with steely courage. She remains active and outwardly cheerful while she resolutely fights the disease’s advance. Only an occasional hidden tear or a brief moment of frustration betray her inner battles.

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We have been reminded how fragile future plans and life’s joys really are. In that knowledge, we treasure what we have, perhaps in a way we otherwise wouldn’t. As some of our daily responsibilities shift, I have learned how many things Jan has always done for us that I hadn’t previously noticed. I also have developed great admiration for her courage and determination that are hidden behind a loving smile and laugh.

To date, she has had two notable challenges. This past summer, her doctor notified the Department of Motor Vehicles of her condition, and despite a flawless lifetime driving record (I don’t count that one speeding ticket), her license was revoked. Her inability to drive and consequent loss of freedom have been difficult for both of us.

Another challenge is that the

disease has in particular focused on her speech center. This is apparently not uncommon. In talking, she may pause because she knows the word she wants to say, but it just won’t come. Her obvious frustration in trying to communicate a thought when the desired word won’t pop into mind makes me want to hug her and say it’s all right. As a result, the always talkative Jan has become quieter and our nonverbal communication skills have improved.

Our children have been very supportive from the beginning. Emily, who is working on her doctorate in biological engineering at a large research hospital in San Francisco, has taken the lead on looking for any advances in treatment that may become available. Some of the new research gives us realistic reason to be hopeful, and we maintain our “Have suitcase—will travel” attitude.

As with our family, it’s a certainty that many other Applegate families quietly live with medical, financial and other challenges. Many of those challenges likely have been intensified by our current economic mess. Like the approval for new medical treatments, the end to this economic crisis is also in that fuzzy “maybe two years from now” category. We can hope for earlier rather than later.

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Who named the Applegate River?

BY SUE ROLLE

Back in 1846, Lindsay and Jessie Applegate came through our area when laying out the Southern Emigrant Road. They were looking for a more southerly route across the cascades to join the main Oregon Trail in southeastern Idaho. It was said that Lindsay saw the river from the mountains north of what is now Grants Pass. He thought it was a distinctly different river than the Rogue. His fellow explorers thought it was a “bend” in the Rogue River and teased him about it, calling it “Applegate’s River.”

Another possibility is that the river was named in 1848 when Lindsay passed through the area on

this was to the newly discovered gold fields of California.

The Takelma Indians called the river “S’bink (Beaver) River.” The Shastas called it “Itskatawayeki.”

The Athapascans referred to the river as “Ta’khoope.”

These tidbits were taken from John and Marguerite Black’s book, *Ruch and the Upper Applegate Valley*, Olga Weydemeyer Johnson’s *They Settled in Applegate Country*, and Jeff LaLande’s, *From Abbott Butte to Zimmerman Burn*. These publications are available at local southern Oregon libraries.

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John Byrne Ranch on the Upper Applegate, January 18, 1933.

“Winter is the time for comfort, for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand and for a talk beside the fire: it is the time for home.”

- Edith Sitwell

“Winter is the season in which people try to keep the house as warm as it was in the summer, when they complained about the heat.”

- Anonymous