

TRENDS AND OBSERVATIONS

A new sunrise

BY RAUNO PERTTU

A year ago, after dementia had slowly destroyed my beloved wife, Jan, she passed away. At the end, her dementia had even stolen her ability to swallow food or water, but the Jan I knew had been stolen away by this terrible disease long before that.

My son Kirk and daughter Emily, concerned about me being alone, said I should start dating. The thought of dating was strange and somewhat frightening after so many years of marriage. At their urging, and with the additional urging of more family and friends, I began to date—an unfamiliar ritual after 40 years.

I took a few very nice ladies to dinner, and confirmed that I much prefer the companionship of a lady to being alone. I also recognized that, after decades of a happy marriage, I was actually looking for a serious relationship. The ladies I met were mostly divorced and looking for someone to take them to dinner, a show, or a social event, but nothing serious.

I commented to Kirk and Emily that there aren't many single ladies in our rural Applegate Valley. They said I should check out the online dating sites. I said I couldn't do that, but they replied, "Everyone does it these days," and added that's how some of their friends had met. Kirk recommended one that he said is probably the most-used site with the most people.

With their urging, I decided to take the plunge. I answered the online questions and reviewed the profiles of the local ladies on the site. It soon became almost a morning ritual to check out who had looked at my profile and whom the site had flagged for me to review. One day, I noticed that I could also see who had looked at my site but moved on, presumably with no interest. I promptly checked out who had checked me out and

moved on to better candidates.

Among this list of uninterested ladies was a pretty face with a big smile that immediately caught my attention. Her write-up was sincere and unpretentious. She was a widow after almost 40 years of a happy marriage. When she wrote that her idea of a fun date was taking a walk along the shore, then topping it off with fish tacos, I became intrigued. When she wrote that she was a "smile machine," I was interested. I could get accustomed to that smile.

However, there were two immediate problems—she had rejected me, and she lived in La Paz on the Baja Peninsula in Mexico. La Paz is not just right next door, and I wondered why she was living there. I decided on a cautious approach. I emailed her to ask for her advice. I told her I had also lost a spouse after 40 years, was out of practice with meeting ladies, and did she have any advice?

To my delight, she sent me a nice reply. We quickly exchanged a long flurry of emails. She had rejected me because I had mentioned that, as an Oregon university graduate, I enjoy Ducks football. Her image was of me sprawled on the sofa watching football in my t-shirt while smashing empty beer cans against my forehead. I was able to convince her it's not that bad. My forehead isn't tough enough for beer cans, and my t-shirt is usually clean. It turned out she and her

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husband had come to La Paz on their sailboat after sailing in the South Pacific and had fallen in love with the town. They bought a house, sold their boat, met many wonderful people and settled in. After her husband died, also at a too-early age, she, like me, realized she would rather share her life than live alone.

During our emailing, I got her real name, Ana Hall, and her Skype number. We were soon able to see and hear each other, which was much better than just emails. Somewhere in the midst of all our conversations, I thought, "What are we doing? She's almost two thousand miles from here." Her reply to my concern was "So what? We've both done a lot of traveling."

I thought she was right and booked a flight to La Paz. Because of all the time we had spent online and on Skype, when we met for the first time it seemed that we already knew each other. To me, she was even better in person. My week in La Paz passed quickly and happily. That trip was soon followed by two weeks spent together mostly in San Francisco (medical follow-ups—she's a cancer survivor), with a quick trip to the Applegate.

I soon made a second trip to La Paz. While there, I noticed that La Paz's warm sunshine felt better on my old face than our cold winter wind and rain. We were soon discussing spending future winters in La Paz.

For 26 years, I have enjoyed this special

property on the river. However, as beautiful, comfortable and private as it is, with Jan and the children gone, I was unsuccessfully struggling with maintaining the acreage, house and outbuildings. Although I was trying to resist becoming just another old snowbird, I had also been considering winters in a warmer spot. When Ana told me she hates the winter cold, we had the obvious answer: winters in La Paz.

Although I don't yet speak Spanish, she is fluent, I want to learn, and there is a flourishing community of other snowbirds in La Paz. Ana soon volunteered to join me in the Applegate to get my house ready for sale. I don't think she knew what she had volunteered for, because she had no idea how much I had accumulated over the years. She has become an expert seller on eBay, and knows how to separate the worthwhile from the junk. We are planning an estate sale and yard sale(s) so we can sell the house. I hadn't appreciated how much I had let the house, outbuildings and property deteriorate during the years when Jan was declining. All this means that we will both be busy getting the house emptied and repaired for sale, while squeezing in ample goof-off time.

I love the Applegate Valley, which has been my year-round home for the past 26 years. However, starting this coming winter, I plan to sadly miss those cold winter days in the Applegate, while having to tolerate warm sunshine in La Paz. A new sunrise has dawned for Ana and me. Our spouses would be happy for us.

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Sap tap wrap 2

BY LAIRD FUNK

February! What a sweet month for our local bigleaf maple tappers! After our January maple flows, things seemed to slow down a bit entering into February. We wondered if we were done and should start cleaning up and putting our equipment away for the season. We had finished off the month with three quarts of syrup put away and were hoping for more in February, but it looked like we were going to be out of luck.

But a week into the month the weather took a cold turn and we woke up to a good freeze with a sunny afternoon forecast to follow and we hit the woods again. Due to the low period, many of our tap holes had started to seal up and were not giving what they could. So we spent a couple hours drilling new holes in our trees and moving the taps. I ended up with 30 spiles in 28 trees, and the collection jugs started filling rapidly. We were back in the syrup business!

Tapping bigleaf maples differs in a couple ways from the traditional sugar maple tapping back east. On the east coast, the sugar maples usually do not flow until the end of February or the beginning of March when the freeze relents enough for the sap to start moving in the trees. There it freezes hard enough to actually freeze the trees and they must thaw before collection can begin.

In Oregon, because we do not experience the same hard-freezing weather, the flow pattern is quite different. As noted in a landmark 1971 study on bigleaf tapping done by the U.S. Forest Service, in the coast range bigleaf maples can flow all the way from early October right after leaf drop to late February when the buds start to swell, depending on the weather. Records kept for the study showed that the sugar content of the sap increased as the season progressed, with levels starting out below 1 percent in early months but often reaching the standard 2 percent Brix (sugar) in late January and early February.

Our experience locally last February was similar. While our first flow in January gave sap with a Brix level of just 1 percent, it had increased to about 1.25 percent by end of month. When the sap flow started in February, the levels continued to increase with the flows from the second week averaging 1.5 percent. By the last week of collecting, the Brix level was right at 2 percent!

I collected almost exactly the same amount of sap in January as I did in February in the same amount of time. But the increased Brix levels made a big difference. While our finished syrup in January totaled about three quarts, February's return from the same amount of sap was over five quarts, and we used about

25 percent less propane for that increase than we used in January! Between the two months, two gallons of sweet maple syrup was stashed in the pantry for use over the next year. While we do use a lot of it here at home, a bunch of it gets given away for birthday and Christmas gifts to lucky folks.

The main bigleaf maple event is the Bigleaf Maple Syrup Festival held in February each year on Vancouver Island. The public gets to see tree-tapping and syrup-making, and there is a tasting contest for island producers. This year I became the first international entry—or at least I tried hard to be.

Encouraged by friends in British Columbia, I packaged up my sample a couple weeks ahead of time and sent it off. But two weeks later it had not shown up and I missed the judging! A week later it arrived totally covered in Canada customs sealing tape. There was no explanation of the delay or the tape, but clearly it must have really interested customs officers. Maybe the concept of sending maple syrup to Canada just seemed too suspicious. Anyway, my Canadian mentor stashed it in the freezer for next year's contest.

A fun ending to the season came by email from a gentleman named Mike Farrell at Cornell University. Mike runs the maple syrup research program at Cornell and is the director of Cornell's Uihlein Field Station endowed by Henry Uihlein II and Mildred A. Uihlein. He directs research in sugar maple improvement and collection advances. With 5,000 trees all



The Applegater staff recommends trying a maple pudding cake with a large scoop of gourmet French vanilla ice cream.

connected by vacuum lines to a central sugaring building, he is able to collect up to 15 gallons per minute with a push of a button!

Mike is writing a book on tree syrups in North America and was sent the last *Applegater* article by my friend Gary in Ladysmith, British Columbia. I sent Mike a sample of my syrup and he replied that I should be proud of such a great product! He will include a bigleaf section in his book along with sections on sugar maples, box elders, birches and black walnuts. Black walnuts? Yes! Black walnuts! Mike says the syrup is delicious and preferred by some over maple! If you have any black walnuts you would like to experiment with, give me a call!

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