

# Women on the farm

My son Willie is purchasing a farmstead down the road from my place which has been in the ownership of the same family — the third generation of whom still resides in the house — since the 1880s.

The property consists of a late-Victorian farmhouse constructed around the turn of the last century, a bunkhouse of similar vintage, a barn (the true hub of activity on the place) built in 1917 and a “modern” aluminum-clad combination repair shop/equipment storage shed that was completed in 1952. The proprietor of the place from the 1910s through the 1970s was the son of Finnish immigrants who attended grade school down the road from the farmstead and then went to work farming, without higher education to muddle his clear view of the world as he knew it. He married and raised nine children in the residence, which still comprises no more than perhaps 1,500 square feet.

A woodshed only a couple dozen paces from the back door supplied the necessary energy for heat and cooking to keep the family warm and nourished. A brick cellar perhaps eight steps from the back door was the larder in which was stored everything from cured pork (raised and butchered on site), to pickles made from the cucumber patch in the low-lying, sub-irrigated flat half a mile distant, to the canned applesauce from

the orchard in back of the house.

A milk cow or two were always present in the barnyard and chickens always occupied the coop, supplying fresh eggs as well as fresh meat for special occasions such as Sunday dinner or entertaining visiting neighbors or relatives.

While back one of my favorite neighbors stopped in for a driveway bull session and suggested, quite correctly, that the hard work of our male agrarian ancestors is well-known and celebrated but the accomplishments of the womenfolk are sometimes overlooked, and yet, are truly worthy of recognition.

I have stated before that one of my all-time heroes was my maternal grandmother. She was born into a world where the necessary skill set included the ability to kill a chicken swiftly with an axe as well as the talent required to bake desserts for a harvest crew of a dozen or more. Her mother would have also been required to operate a hand-powered pitcher pump to supply domestic water and have the ability to hitch up the team to go to town for supplies.

A far less cumbersome modern equivalent for my lovely bride would be driving one of my several stick-shift, no power steering, no air-conditioning, manual choke-equipped International Harvesters to town.

Although not every farmer would admit

it, most farm wives did not enjoy as much sleep as their husbands. Even if care for the young ones was not an issue, someone still had to rise well before dawn to start the fire in the cookstove.

That same someone also was probably still washing dishes, doing laundry, or preparing for tomorrow’s chores well after dark. Weed control in the garden, not to mention planting the garden, and if necessary hauling water to irrigate, were also likely under the auspices of the farm wife. All of the above was done, at least traditionally, wearing attire that was nowhere near as comfortable as bib overalls.

One aspect of farm chores from days of yore that I frequently emphasize (perhaps to a level of annoyance to some) is the importance of everyone participating — even the children. Child labor laws were no doubt necessary in sweat shops and factories of yesteryear but were once unheard of on the farm.

Kids were expected to work at necessary chores such as splitting wood in the wintertime to keep the woodbox full, hoeing weeds to help mom in the garden or dad in the field, or milking the cow and gathering eggs. Animals needed to be fed and watered regardless of whether or not they were reminded to do so by parents.

I have a good friend and neighbor who just celebrated his 85th birthday. As a result of his father being injured and his older brother being off to war, he was forced to assume responsibility for management of the farm at age ten.

This meant that 160 acres had to be plowed and planted with a team of horses and 11 cows had to be milked twice a



**MATT WOOD**  
FROM THE TRACTOR

day—by hand (his handshake is still firm and genuine).

This early set of circumstances set him on a course that he still pursues three-quarters of a century later — honest work for honest pay, self-reliance and the need to conjugate, commune and commiserate at one of the community’s three important institutions — the school, the church and the tavern.

*Matt Wood is his son’s hired man and his daughter’s biggest fan. He lives on a farm near Helix, where he collects antiques and friends.*

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## Quick takes

### Pendleton couple helps care for Las Vegas wounded

Nobody knows from one moment to the next what could take place. So many people act without a second thought, they just jump in and do what has to be done. Thank you for your bravery and willingness to help others who are suffering and needing your help. God bless you all ... true heroes!

— **Barbara White**

Boy was I surprised to see this. Kevin is my husband’s former boss. Such a wonderful man. I am so thankful that God kept you guys safe and you were able to administer aid.

— **Michelle Carol**

No such thing as “off duty” for any first responder. I’m sorry that you folks had to deal with that but am glad that you were there to do what you do best. Thank you for doing what you did with what you had available. Blessed be!

— **Sonia Benedict**

Thank you for your courage and service. We are so proud of you!

— **Nancy Hanson**

### Police to crack down on Highway 395 jaywalking

Had a college girl on her phone walk right in front of my semi. She is lucky I pay so much attention I saw her 30 feet before she got to the road.

— **Tory Bull Covlin**

*One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week’s takes. Tweet yours @Tim\_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.*

## In the spirit of understanding racism

During my 13 years in Rapid City, South Dakota, I’ve learned that racism and ignorance almost always go hand-in-hand. The West was “won,” many people learn in school, but what did westward expansion mean for the Native people who were already living on the land?

The lure of gold brought explorers, miners and then homesteaders to South Dakota during the 19th and early 20th centuries. I imagine that most of those “invaders” — from my point of view — didn’t think twice about booting the local people out of the way. But that was then. The question today is why racism persists when America prides itself on tolerance and respecting diversity.

Here are examples from my life that reveal the kind of blatant racism I’ve experienced, as well as some of the unconscious racism that is sometimes almost comical.

I go to a Rapid City council meeting where a white local suggests placing statues of Native Americans in Founders Park, rather than in the proposed First Nations Sculpture Gallery in Halley Park. As Native author Elizabeth Cook-Lynn put it, the suggestion was made “without a hint of irony.” After all, who were the original founders if not Native people?

I go to the veterans’ parade where the 7th United States Cavalry, formed in 1866 to protect homesteaders and raid Native villages, is still honored. These days, of course, more Natives serve in the military per capita than any other ethnic group, according to the director of the National Museum of the American Indian. But few Natives march with the veterans in the parade.



**EVELYN RED LODGE**  
Comment

I find a Black Hills trail guide listing the 7th Cavalry Trail as if it’s fun for people to follow the trail of mass murderers who killed anywhere from 75 to 125 babies, children and women at Wounded Knee in 1890.

I buy a Happy Meal for my daughter only to find a 7th Cavalry Custer doll inside. She gets upset when I try to explain why I think it belongs in the trash.

In a jewelry shop along Mount Rushmore Road, I look at the gold for which my grandparents’ territory was invaded and spot a wine-bottle holder depicting a Native chief chugging a bottle of wine. Old stereotypes die hard. According to a recent study in the journal Drug and Alcohol Drug Dependence, alcohol consumption by Natives is shown to be generally less than that of Caucasians in the United States.

Just walking downtown in Rapid City, the so-called City of Presidents, I spot the stores along the way that used to sport signs saying “No Indians or Dogs Allowed.” I go to He Sapa — the Black Mountains — where I look upon the faces of past U.S. presidents who helped wipe out so many Indigenous peoples. I remember that Natives were only declared to be citizens by the United States Congress less than 100 years ago.

In 2015, I feared to go to any sporting event after a drunk beer salesman poured beer on Native students at a hockey game and shouted, “Go back to the reservation!” Within days, dumping beer on Natives had become a common occurrence at other venues.

I picked up the local newspaper four days after the drunk hockey fan did his business, and the question was raised on

the front page: Had the Native students who were attacked stood for the national anthem? (Not that it should make any difference, but it was reported that the students did stand.)

I feared to walk on the north side of Rapid City in 2009 and 2010, after at least two Native families with children were egged while racial slurs were hurled at them. “Go back to where you came from!” is a laughable favorite. One Native woman, who was disabled, was run off the road while driving her car. Urine in bottles was thrown on other Natives. Some Natives were shot with pellet guns.

At the same time — and I am glad to report this — many of the attackers were held accountable after much public outcry:

The jewelry store owner removed the wine holder featuring a drunken Native from her window after local media asked why she’d given it prominence.

The newspaper removed its victim-blaming story from its Internet site.

Two 21-year-old women were arrested in the incident involving the disabled woman, becoming the first in the state to be charged with its new hate-crime law, “malicious intimidation or harassment.”

As for failures in the quest for justice, the drunk hockey fan was eventually acquitted of his one and only charge of disorderly conduct. And I am unaware of any charges brought against anyone for the attacks involving egg and urine throwing and pellet guns.

Racism persists, I am sorry to report. I still feel it every day.

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