



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Kay Davis sits on one of two steamer trunks that belonged to her great-grandfather and were filled with family photos, genealogy and artifacts. Davis kept the trunks with her as she moved from place to place.

# TRUNKS COME HOME

Woman carries family history from Oregon to New York City and back

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Over the past few decades, Kay Cardwell Davis' two steamer trunks full of family artifacts accompanied her to New York, Kansas, Florida, and finally to Pendleton. Though not originally from Pendleton, Davis feels like she and the trunks have finally come home. ∞ The story of how she found her way involves her love of family history, an internship at Penthouse Magazine and reconnecting with a lost love.

Davis, who grew up in Portland, moved to New York City after high school to study at the Parsons School of Design. Through friends, she met Kevin Stewart who attended the School of Visual Arts just down the street from Parsons. The two design students had much in common and they began a relationship.

The summer before Davis' junior year, she won an internship at Penthouse Magazine as a mechanical artist. At the beginning, Davis felt some trepidation. The mid-1980s was a scandalous time, she said. Under pressure from religious fundamentalists, the parent company of the 7-Eleven convenience store chain stopped selling Penthouse and other adult magazines.

On her first day at work, "I didn't know what to expect," she said.

She found a culture that was surprisingly "respectful." The company also had a dress code that required male employees to wear suits and ties and the women to don skirts, heels and stockings. Davis worked her way up to a full-time job as assistant art director and stayed three-and-a-half years.

"It was a job that helped pay bills and for my schooling," she said. "I was a sponge.

It was my first job out there in the real world. There are things I learned in that job that I still use today."

At the end of college, she and Stewart broke up. They married other people and had families. Each of their broods features a set of twins.

Davis and her husband moved to Wichita, Kansas, where she worked as creative director for Koch Industries, a multinational corporation in which brothers David and Charles Koch have majority interest. When the economy tanked in the mid-2000s, she was laid off. A divorce followed in early 2014.

Stewart, who remained in New York City, had his own demons. He was reeling after his own divorce. In 2007, he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

Davis found comfort looking through her trunks of family artifacts and genealogy documents that she drags with her wherever she moves. The trunks represented her roots and some spellbinding family stories. Her uncle, Sid Cardwell, a genealogy buff who revealed in researching the family tree, had unearthed a multitude of family artifacts.

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ABOVE LEFT Sidney (S.J.) Cardwell holds his catch about a century ago. Great-granddaughter Kay Davis now has his fishing creel.

ABOVE RIGHT Kay Davis's great-grandparents, S.J. and Jennie Cardwell, came west from Missouri in the 1890s.

Contributed photos

LEFT A fishing creel belonging to Kay Davis' great-grandfather will have a place of honor in her shop on Pendleton's Main Street, which will open in February.

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