

J.D. SMITH

FROM THE HEADWATERS OF DRY CREEK

Bull spit, Round-Up week begins with bull riding kickoff

It is Pendleton Round-Up week, and I am at the bull riding kickoff. I am sitting in an eighth row seat of a 4,000-person grandstand wearing relatively clean clothes, White's boots, and a Mariners ball cap, surrounded by folks in cheap straw hats adorned with chicken feathers and wearing too pointy-toed plastic-lizard boots.

Some have tucked their pants into their boots and tied a snot-rag around their throat; junior account executives dressed as though they expect to buckaroo through brambles during a dust storm.

A beer-can toss below me is a dirt arena surrounded by Powder River steel panels, with the words U.S. Bank carefully scratched by a shovel artist into the fluffy dirt floor, each letter about 10 feet tall. Across the arena, above the bucking chutes, hangs a video screen the size of a couple of sheets of plywood that loops commercials from tonight's corporate sponsors, including the local hospital, the smokeless tobacco industry, two cell phone companies, a casino, an insurance company and U.S. Bank.

Between commercial episodes, the entire west half of Pendleton is flooded with "I-might-cheat-on-you-Honey-but-never-on-America" canned twang being blasted from a bank of 6-foot speakers mounted beside the screen. My date, a musician, tears her hamburger napkins into little spit-wads and crams them in her ears, then points toward a holding pen at the east end of the chutes and asks, "What in the hell is he doing?"

I recognize the scene. Two young bull riders have brought modern athletic techniques to the rodeo game and are visualizing their rides-to-occur. Each holds a fist tightly clenched around an imaginary bull rope directly in front of his Wrangler zipper, his other arm held above his head, legs spread around an invisible bull. The athletes herk and jerk and spin around the pen in a dance that would elicit applause in the baths of San Francisco but surely get them arrested in the produce aisle of the Safeway. Context is everything.

At eight o'clock high, the announcer asks us to stand for the invocation, during which he asks for divine protection for the contestants, the audience, the bulls and, of course, our country. Then a teen violinist plays a technically perfect National Anthem over the megawatt speaker system. I wince at every amplification of the rasp of her fingers moving up and down the strings. Some instruments don't translate well to locomotive scale.

While we still stand, the arena goes dark as the inside of a cat, there is a beam of bright red from somewhere in the superstructure and the U.S. Bank logo in the dirt bursts into diesel fueled flames. A country rock band blows chunks of patriotism while a hundred more points of laser light whiz overhead like zap rays from alien craft.

Epileptic spotlights whip back and forth through the exhaust cloud, take a couple of shots at the three-quarter moon, and finally settle on the bucking chutes, where a chorus line of 39 bull pokes, clad in every hue of shirt and chaps, stand under a slew of broad brimmed black hats.

The announcer introduces each of them, tonight's gladiators. I recognize a few of the names from my home studies, including an older bull rider, who is 35. These fellows average in the mid-20s. The beefiest of them might weigh slightly more than my left leg. (Bull riders are small by design. A whirling tennis ball on a string is less likely to break the string than is a bowling ball.) But they are all professional bull riders who have climbed through a formal farm team system to make it to this level.

There are rules. Generally speaking, the contestant climbs into a confined space with a 1,500-pound very male bovine, ties a rope with a handle around the animal just behind the front legs, holds the rope taut with one hand, straddles the bull, slides forward, nods for the gate to open while another person pulls tight a "flank strap" just south of the bull's bullness and just north of its ballness. This encourages the bull to buck.

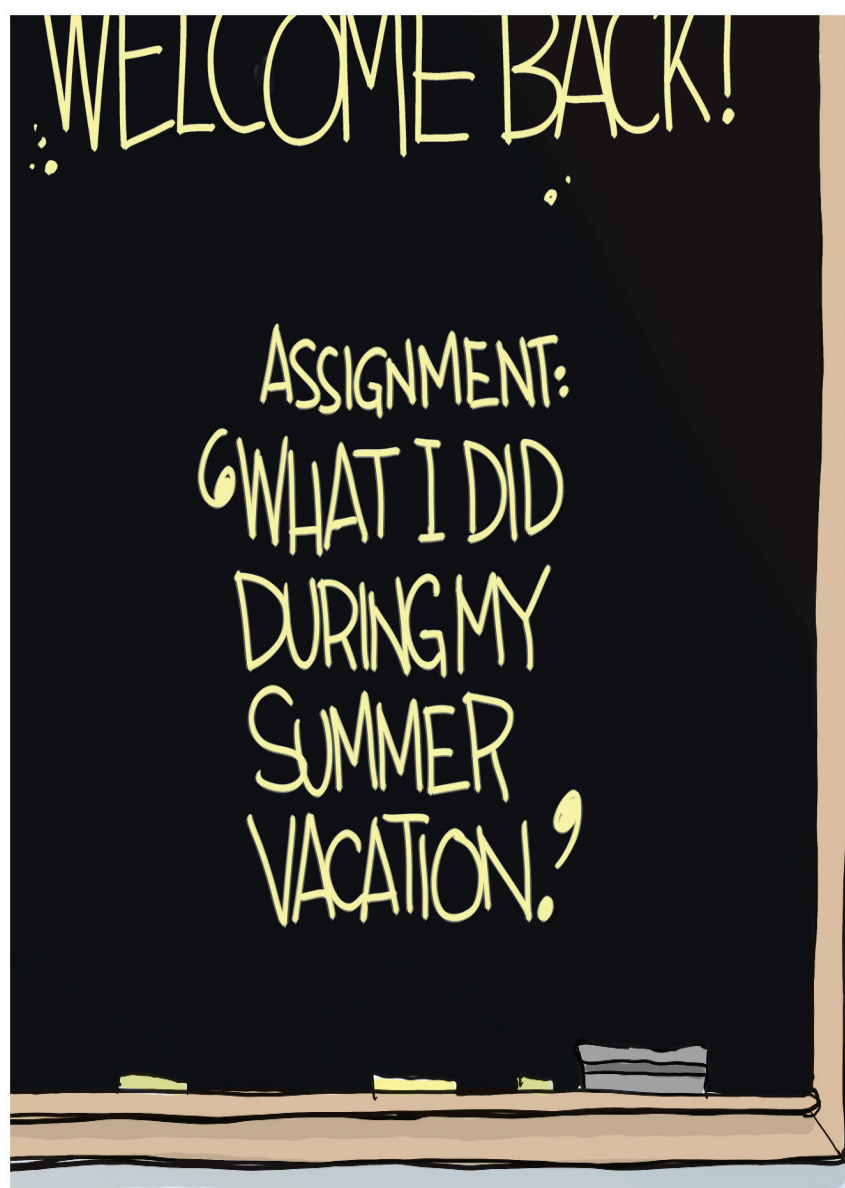
The rider's object is to stay astride the bull for eight seconds without touching it with the other hand. The animal's goal is to dislodge the monkey on its back as quickly as possible so that it can go back to the holding pen for a late evening snack and bull session. Both the rider and the bull are scored on their performances by a couple of guys with clipboards.

More often than not the bull doesn't have to work a full eight seconds. Some lose their composure and try to squash, slobber, gore, trample, butt, scoot, nose or roll on the cowpokes. That is why we in the audience are here, to live dangerously, but vicariously.

The real heroes of the night are the bullfighters, whose jobs are to make themselves the objects of the bovine ire, to put themselves between the contestant and a ton of angry burger on the hoof until the cowboy can pull his face out of the arena floor and make it safely to the fence. The bullfighters are successful tonight, and no contestant is hauled away in an ambulance.

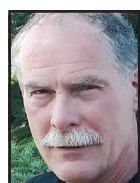
No, Virginia, there are no female bull riders in the Professional Bull Riders yet. I don't know why, or if things will ever change, but it is not my fault. I would hope, though, that most young women have sense enough to avoid the testosterone-flooded aspects of all participants, human and bovine, even if a few semi-suicidal women are lured by the \$15,508 that the little fellow from Sao Paulo, Brazil, hobbled away with at the end of this event.

J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.



JOHN COLE
OFTENTIMES TRIBUNE
SCRANTON, PA.

Negotiate the inevitable transitions we all face



JOHN WINTERS

HEALTH CARE ESSENTIALS

The gentleman cheerfully explained why he was selling his lawn mower. He was 97 years old and no longer able to mow his own lawn.

Losing our abilities and letting go of what no longer serves our best interests is hard to do, yet this fellow seemed to have mastered the art of a smooth transition. Change is what happens to us, transition is the internal response to these events.

Researcher and author William Bridges said, "Every transition begins with an ending and ends with a beginning. Between the ending and beginning lurks an awkward neutral zone most want to avoid, but is essential to personal growth."

Transition is the hardest place to be. Liminal space is that space between where you have been and what comes next in your life. It is a place of unknowing, which often involves loss, letting go, accepting new or different conditions and moving on. We want to skip this part, but it is where we learn the most. Transition could be likened to a slippery log over a rushing mountain stream which you must cross to reach the meadow beyond.

Barbara Kingsolver said, "The changes we dread most may contain our

salvation." Our modern lives are full of uncertainty and change ... even the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted in 500 BCE, "Everything changes, nothing stays the same." Adjusting to ongoing changes with COVID-19, politics, climate change, wildfires and smoke takes energy. Then there are personal concerns like our jobs, health and relationships. It helps to realize adaptation takes energy and thought. We want to reach the meadow, but getting there is tricky and we have to pay attention.

Our internal workings, brain and body, crave calm. Life for the body is easiest when all needs are met and nothing changes. Wouldn't that be nice, at least for a while? Any shifts in the internal milieu require attention and adjustment. A new job or relationship, illness or loss of any sort affects your inner balance. Events, whether you label them good or bad, occur daily.

Having a child, starting a new job or losing a loved one all require adjustments. Stress can make you stronger, or sicker. Problems arise when changes in your life outpace your current resources and ability to adapt. Our body is built to withstand just about anything, but self awareness makes the job a lot easier. Some stress is vital to an interesting adventurous productive life, but to get there you have to cross the bridge of transition. When challenged, our body and mind work to recover. Failure to regain inner balance and peace can result in anxiety, depression, weight gain, fatigue, poor sleep and many chronic diseases.

You can take steps to safely cross the

risky transition zone! Your thoughts are most important.

"Self talk," those recordings in your head, can build you up or tear you down. Practice thinking rationally, creatively and constructively. Recall your past successes and use those skills again. Choose humor, acceptance, health and gratitude over blaming, complaining, denial or worry. Improving physical health with restful sleep, daily physical activity, mindful breathing, relaxation and healthy foods builds a body strong enough to pull you through the transition.

Connection to others by sharing or asking for help — listening and being heard, is helpful.

Remember to take breaks, celebrate even small successes and have fun.

Kate Berardo offers "The 5 R's of Change."

- Routines: activities, food, rituals create structure.
- Reactions: to what others say and do. Take nothing personally.
- Roles: gain clarity on your role.
- Relationships: choose positive, stable, satisfying relationships. Nurture the important relationships.
- Reflection: about your values. What has worked, or not worked for you in the past? Avoiding change and adapting to change each take energy. The choice of how to negotiate the inevitable transitions we all face in our lives is yours. May you flow well.

John Winters is a naturopathic physician who retired after operating a practice in La Grande since 1992.

Making college affordable for millions of Americans



BRENT WILDER

OTHER VIEWS

The Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities urges Congress to double the amount provided to students awarded Pell Grants. Doubling Pell is not only the most effective way to make college affordable and accessible for students, but it is also the easiest and most efficient way for Congress to make college possible for young adults and returning learners.

Today, there are nearly seven million Americans who receive Pell Grants each year, hailing from congressional districts across the country and using the education they receive to better themselves, their communities and their states. Oregon students received \$268,804,042 in Pell Grant awards during the 2019-20 academic year. In the same year, 26% of the undergraduate student population at Alliance member colleges and universities made use of the Pell Grant. For 85% of under-

graduate students, the Pell Grant is one piece of the financial aid puzzle, in addition to aid, grants and scholarships they receive from the Alliance institutions they attend.

The Pell Grant has not kept pace with the increasing financial demands of higher education. When Pell Grants were developed nearly 50 years ago, they covered more than 75% of the total cost of college. Today, the maximum grant covers less than 30%. The quickest way to provide accessible higher education is to make it financially attainable. Congress should join President Joe Biden's commitment to doubling Pell and look to create a mandatory funding stream and an automatic increase indexed against the Consumer Price Index to ensure the Pell Grant continues to meet the financial needs of future students.

It is essential for Congress to act now and double the Pell from \$6,495 to \$13,000. This will ensure community college is free for all Pell-eligible students and will curtail the debt taken on by students who decide to attend four-year colleges and universities. Doubling Pell will provide young adults of all backgrounds (37% of Alliance students identify as people of color)

with differing levels of education attainment in their families (23% of Alliance students are first generation) the ability to access the college or training program that best fits their educational needs. Additional money for students diversifies their choices for field of study, institution type and duration of program.

Pell Grants have proven over the last five decades to be the most effective and equitable path to making college affordable. Doubling the Pell Grant will ensure that Congress continues to serve low- and moderate-income students and families from all backgrounds for years to come. It will open doors for all students at a time when opportunities, access and affordability are most needed.

There is no better way to celebrate the Pell Grant's landmark 50th anniversary in June 2022 than doubling the program that has made college affordable for millions of Americans. To learn more about how you can help with this important advocacy, please visit our website www.doublepell.org.

Brent Wilder is the president of the Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities.