

# A hound's memory



**J.D. SMITH**  
FROM THE HEADWATERS  
OF DRY CREEK

Not long ago, a friend asked if I had a picture of my great-grandfather. I had to confess that I did not know who my great-grandfathers were.

I know that my maternal great-grandmother had one leg, and that both of my grandfathers came from the Ozarks of Missouri, one fleeing home because his brothers were hanging around with Jesse James and he homesteaded in a sod house in the Sandhills of Nebraska. The other proved up on a chunk of dry land in northeastern Colorado where he survived the 1930s by becoming a traveling pickle salesman.

So, the Missouri connection is what, long ago, led my folks and me to drive from Alliance, Nebraska, to Rutledge, Missouri, to visit my mom's cousin Bobbie, who had her single wide moved closer to the road so she could better hear the trucks climbing the grade south of her place. That is about as hillbilly as one can get.

While we were there we attended the National Coon Dog Auction. There were maybe 200 hounds of all types tethered in an acre of open land that one-by-one were led up a set of stairs to a platform erected outside the hay loft of a big red weather wrinkled barn.

Then the owners would brag about the dogs and a super mumbling auctioneer would sell them to bidders below, on trial, meaning that the buyer would have the option to hunt with the dogs that night, then return the mutt if not satisfied with its performance. Apparently there were enough raccoons to go around in that part of the woods.

Of course, no one said what a no-account mangy cur they were trying to sell. The emphasis of the sales pitch usually was on the dog's voice, how one could tell by the frequency of the yips and yaps and baying whether the pack of dogs were running a coon or whether something had been treed.

Apparently the technique of successful raccoon hunting is to loose the hounds then sit on a stump drinking beer until you can tell by the noise that the dogs have found

some critter and ran it up a tree. Then you go retrieve the hounds. I don't think any raccoons were murdered during the process.

It was mid-afternoon when an older gentleman led an older female redbone hound up the stairs. Both had gray whiskers. I can still hear the Ozark twang in his voice as he told the following story...

"This here's Nellie. She is getting a little long in the tooth and a little short in the get up and go, but she's been a real good dog, raised many a litter of good hunters and never bit nobody. She's a blood relative to a good quarter of the dogs chained out yonder."

"Now a feller might wonder what a serious coon hunter would want with a grandmother dog like Nellie. She ain't gonna be out in front of the pack, that's for sure, but she sure has a great memory, and that comes in useful sometimes. Here, let me give you an example."

"A week or so back a feller came out to my farm and said he wanted to buy the best hound I had. I directed him toward Nellie and when he asked what made her so special, I told him it was her memory, to come in for supper and then we would take her into the woods and demonstrate her skills.

"By the time we had our bellies full it was dark. I called Nellie, pointed off towards the trees and told her to go find us a critter. She ran straight across the pasture, jumped maybe six feet straight up in the air, then ran into the woods. Five minutes later she was telling us that she had something treed, so we took a big flashlight and found her staring up an oak tree and talking.

"We couldn't see the shine from any critter's eyes up in the branches, but she insisted that she had treed something, so I climbed up into the branches. Way up near the top, in the crook of a branch, I found a raccoon skeleton. I brought it down and showed to the feller, reminding him that I had mentioned that Nellie had a pretty stout memory.

"He allowed as he was pretty impressed, but that he figured that there was a good chance that she might be losing her mind, because why else would she have jumped up into the air back there at the beginning?"

"That is when I reminded him that I used to have a fence across that piece of pasture."

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

## We want to see the straight stretches



**LINDSAY MURDOCK**  
FROM SUNUP TO SUNDOWN

It's quiet. I've found myself in an office in the early hours of the day, waiting and watching.

My heart beats slow and steady as I settle into the not-so-comfortable chair I have found myself in more Fridays than I can count. There is a hum of air coming through the vent in the ceiling above me. I hear the clicking of keys on a computer keyboard through the frosted glass across the room. The receptionist I had just spoken to moments before, has her work cut out for her it seems. Papers shuffle, and a phone rings. I catch the sound of laughter, but dismiss it as fast as it arrives.

I wonder what there could possibly be to laugh about right now. I breathe deep, reminding myself that while I wait, it's best for my mental state to count the gifts, look for the good, and acknowledge that this space and this time has already been mapped out for me, just as it has been for her. See the good, Lindsay, see the good, I whisper to myself, and hear it too.

The door opens to my left, and a young mother and her young child walk in. They stand at the same frosted glass, ring the same bell, and wait as patiently as my own son and I had moments before. My mind flashes back to the very first time my boys and I walked into this office. They weren't much older than the boy standing in front of me now, and I wasn't much older than the woman. I wonder, as I watch, if she knows that as hard as it may be to come here, it's worth every amount of effort it takes. I wonder if she knows that she doesn't need to worry.

The glass moves and the familiar voice and words I know by heart echo through the room, not for me this time, but for the young mother I find myself relating to, but really not knowing at all. The glass closes and she takes a seat near me while watching her son play with a toy car she had handed him moments earlier. Her son smiles at her, and she smiles back, as she sits like me, waiting.

I hear the phone ring again, and I glance at the clock, wondering about my own son who has outgrown playing with cars in this office, but hasn't outgrown his need for this place. Does he know that the time spent here each Friday is meant to help, not hinder? I don't really know. Does he feel the love I have for him here and now as I wait for his session to end? I don't know that either. He's down a short hallway, talking about the paper he was supposed to have memorized, only I know that he doesn't have it memorized at all. The paper he was supposed to have practiced reading with me hasn't been touched all week.

In fact, he crumpled the paper the minute he left the office the week before, frustrated and disappointed, more at himself than the

paper. Deep in my heart, I know this part of his story. This address we have visited each week more times than I can count, is where he needs to be, but oh how it tears my heart apart knowing that he sees it as a hindrance, not as an advantage.

I hear laughter again, and am brought back to the present. I shift in my chair, watching the young mother and her son make their way through the doorway toward their scheduled appointment. I smile at them, cheering them on silently, knowing that the journey they're on isn't for the faint at heart. A few minutes later, my son walks through the same doorway with a smile on his face, stepping toward me with a sparkle in his eyes.

"Today was my last day mom," he says. His speech therapist grins as they take turns explaining what had happened during the appointment. His goals had been met. He did what was asked. The waiting was over. Tears filled my eyes and a lump in my throat formed. I knew as I listened that there would still be work to do and setbacks could possibly occur, but the time we had spent putting one foot in front of the other across a parking lot and into an office each week had taken us on a beautiful journey. One that was now over.

We often find ourselves in situations where we wish for lives that are completely mapped out. We want to see the straight stretches, and like to know when to expect sharp turns or roadblocks — lives that are easy to navigate, without many challenges or obstacles to hurdle. That kind of life doesn't exist. The thing that I learned, especially in that specific waiting room, is that those challenges and obstacles that we may not know about until they are upon us, are often exactly what we need them to be.

In the waiting, in the worry, and in the anxiousness of sitting in that office space each week, I learned two very specific things. One, giving my attention to the good that is happening in the places and spaces around me, rather than getting worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow, was, and still is, crucial for navigating any part of life I'm in successfully. And, two, it's absolutely OK to be honest and vulnerable in admitting when we're stuck, and maybe even sick and tired of the journey.

The professional we saw each week was like a compass, pointing us in the right direction and giving us tools to get where we needed to go. Holding a map or a list of addresses of places we need to visit is comforting, but trusting in an unseen and unknown future, with a hope in something or even someone that is bigger than that map, is where I believe we find out what we're really made of.

So if you find yourself waiting somewhere any time soon, like in the pharmacy line, at the post office, in a doctor's office, or even waiting for a ride somewhere, look and see what's good around you. It's a part of your story and worth every second of the wait.

*Lindsay Murdock lives and teaches in Echo.*



'I TAKE IT YOU WEREN'T PLANNING ON GOING TO CHURCH ON SUPER BOWL SUNDAY, BILL...'

## Legislature returns with 'wacky' reputation



**DICK HUGHES**  
OTHER VIEWS

The Oregon Legislature came back to Salem the first week of February and quickly fulfilled its increasingly wacky reputation.

On the opening day of the 2022 session, the state House was testy, the Senate more collegial.

The contentious issue of farm-worker overtime, which I discussed in last week's column, illustrates how the political mood differs in the Senate and House. Sponsored by urban Democrats, House Bill 4002 resides in the House Business and Labor Committee, chaired by state Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene.

But let's start in the Senate, where lawmakers got down to business right away while folks in the House were milling around.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, said if overtime is to be mandated for agricultural employees, it must be done right. He gave a remonstrance — a brief floor speech — in which he thanked Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, for meeting with agricultural producers from Hansell's Senate district to discuss the issue. Hansell pledged to work collaboratively toward "victory" and quoted Courtney:

"It really resonated with me and the (producers) that you said, 'When it comes to legislation, you can have a win or you can have a victory. A win is when one party crams something down and it's not bipartisan when we end up with a vote. A victory is when we work on good policy to bring (people) together and we have a bill that will be supported on both sides of the aisle and also in both chambers.'"

Advocates are using the courts, the Legislature and the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries to push for agricultural overtime. In the House, rural Republicans pushed back in their remonstrances.

Rep. Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, said the latest work group on the topic fell apart because the advocates were not motivated to find a legislative solution. Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis, R-Albany, read an editorial from the Capital Press and echoed a colleague's call for an honest, intellectual conversation.

In a lengthy, heartfelt remonstrance that covered several topics, Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Happy Valley, said farmworkers deserve better treatment and vowed that the Legislature would provide it.

Here are more tidbits from the first week's wonders and wackiness:

The Oregon Capitol finally was open to the public for a legislative session. Sort of.

For the first time, metal detectors greeted anyone entering the Capitol, although Bonham reportedly came through a different door and accidentally evaded them.

Masks are required in the Capitol due to the public health protocols, which led to disagreements between anti-mask protesters and Oregon State Police. Officials disputed media reports that individuals who claimed religious exemptions were allowed in without masks.

An email to the "Capitol Community" from Legislative Administration and the state police said: "There is no religious exemption to the masking requirement, and no one claiming solely such an exemption was permitted to enter the Capitol."

A small number of people, however, requested accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

House Republicans questioned the

mask mandate, especially that they had to wear one even while speaking. The Oregon Capital Chronicle reported that Rep. E. Werner Reschke, R-Klamath Falls, "stood off the House floor without a mask and popped his head in to vote. But he avoided the kind of showdown that ended a December special session, when Courtney had a Senate Republican escorted from the chamber by (Senate staff) for not wearing a mask."

That senator, Dallas Heard, of Roseburg, was not in the Senate on opening day.

The public could watch the opening session from the House gallery. In the Senate, due to COVID-19 concerns, Courtney reversed course and closed the chamber to the public.

For the same reason, legislative committees are operating remotely via video conference and phone. The legislative IT system remained intact, but the Capitol Wi-Fi network used by the public crashed early in the week.

Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, was elected House speaker with only one vote to spare. Democrats and Republicans alike then gave him three standing ovations, including one after his poignant speech that detailed his rough growing up.

Courtney has been giving extensive media interviews about this being his final session as Senate president before retiring. Yet the usually voluble politician abstained from an opening day speech.

One sign of the changing of the guard emerged later in the week when Courtney removed himself from one of his longtime passions, the Oregon State Hospital. He appointed Sen. Kate Lieber, D-Beaverton, to replace him on the mental hospital's advisory board.

The Legislature has so many new members that two newly appointed senators lead committees. Sen. Rachel Armitage, D-Warren, is co-chair of the Joint Committee on Information Management and Technology. Sen. Janeen Sollman, D-Hillsboro, who served in the House, is co-chair of the General Government budget panel.

COVID-19 concerns hung over the Capitol throughout the week. Courtney canceled the Senate's second floor session. Two senators came anyway — Kathleen Taylor, D-Portland, and Fred Girod, R-Lyons — since the Oregon Constitution required Courtney to go through the motions of starting and adjourning the floor session.

Gov. Kate Brown delivered her final State of the State speech live on YouTube instead of the traditional appearance before a House chamber packed with representatives, senators, judges, past governors, other luminaries, the public and journalists. She also did not hold a press conference afterward, either online or in person, to take questions.

Brown took the high road in her half-hour speech, never referring to her critics. But they tuned in, filling the accompanying YouTube chat with often-snarky comments about her mask mandates and other perceived missteps.

Finally, for a humorous and effective explanation of this year's "short" legislative session, check out "Chef Grayber." Rep. Dacia Grayber, D-Tigard, created a faux cooking video on Twitter that explains: "For the long session, we prefer to slow-cook our bills at a steady temperature. For the short session, however, we'll be using a pressure cooker."

She demonstrates a recipe that starts with great ideas and includes a bit of negotiation, some healthy collaboration, a bit of legal vetting, a dose of debate and a dash of compromise.

*Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.*