

First Gentleman recounts time in area

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

Kate Brown’s ascension to the Oregon governor’s chair on Feb. 18 created a link between the Wallowa Valley and the governor’s office. During the time the “First Gentleman,” Dan Little, worked in the Wallowa Valley for the U.S. Forest Service as an information manager, the couple began their relationship, ultimately marrying in 1996.

When the Chieftain learned of the couple’s connection to the Wallowa Valley, we contacted the governor’s office as well as Mr. Little to get more in-depth information about the couple’s time here and how it figured into their relationship. Mr. Little provided written answers to a submitted list of questions, and the Chieftain here presents his responses verbatim.

Chieftain: What year did you and the governor marry?

Little: *We were married at the old roller skating rink by the tram at Wallowa Lake on October 11, 1996 (Columbus Day Weekend). We were hoping for one of those nice sunny, warm fall weekends and decorated the hall with tiny white holiday lights and flowers friends had dried all*



Courtesy photo/Dan Little
Then-Oregon State Senator Kate Brown and husband, Dan Little, take a turn around the dance floor during their Oct. 11, 1996 wedding, held at the old roller rink building near the Wallowa Lake Tramway.

fall. Unfortunately, unseasonably cold weather moved into the area and we were left scrambling to find propane heaters to heat that big very cold, drafty hall. Snow start-

ed falling soon after the ceremony ended and it turned out to be one of those magical nights spent with family and friends enjoying music and good food.

Statues panel recommends Chief Joseph for U.S. Capitol

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Oregon’s Statuary Hall Study Commission selected the Wallowa Valley’s most famous past resident, Nez Perce leader (“young”) Chief Joseph (Heinmot Tooyalakekt), as one of two statues to possibly represent Oregon in the National Statuary Hall Collection housed in the U.S. Capitol Building. The commission also selected women’s suffragist Abigail Scott Duniway to represent the state. The commission made the March 4 announcement at the Oregon State Capitol.

The commission’s selections still need approval by the state legislature for the project to move forward.

Former Governor John Kitzhaber ordered the creation of the nine-member commission in August of 2014 to investigate whether or not to replace the current two statues representing the state at the U.S. Capitol, as well as selecting the possible replacements. Starting with 10 nominees, the commission narrowed the field to four in December. Former U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield and former Governor Tom McCall were the other finalists.

Chief Joseph (1840–1904) served as one of the leaders of the Wallowa Band of the Nez Perce tribe. In 1877 the U.S. government ordered the tribe out of the Wallowa Valley and to take up residence at the Lapwai Reservation in Clearwater, Idaho. While on the journey to Clearwater, a dispute with white Idaho



Young Chief Joseph

settlers led to the deaths of several settlers. Fearing repercussions, the tribe fled, eventually setting course for the sanctuary of Canada. The U.S. Cavalry caught up

with the tribe on Sept. 30 at what is now called Bear Paw Battlefield, near Chinook, Mont., just 40 miles from the Canadian border. After several days of siege, Joseph, the only tribal leader left, surrendered with a magnificent speech on Oct. 5, 1877.

Contrary to press reports at the time, Joseph was not a war leader or strategist, but rather a human resources/camp manager.

Despite promises the tribe could return to the reservation in Clearwater, the government placed the tribe first at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., and later moved it to Oklahoma Indian Territory. As the spokesman for the tribe, and a national celebrity, Chief Joseph worked tirelessly to

Chieftain: Did you meet the governor while you were working here (or how did you meet)?

Little : *We met through mutual friends of my parents while we were attending college in Colorado. She was studying Environmental Conservation at the University of Colorado and I was attending Colorado State University studying Forestry.*

Chieftain: What was your USFS position while you worked here?

Little: *I was the Information Manager (GIS Coordinator) for the Wallowa Mountains Zone on the Wallowa Whitman National Forest from 1991-1998. Previously I had worked in John Day and Grants Pass, Oregon as a field forester. The Chieftain actually did an article on the work I was doing sometime around 1985 or '86. Don't remember the exact date....*

Chieftain: What was the governor’s government position at the time?

Little: *She was serving in the Oregon Senate representing southeast Portland.*

Chieftain: Was the governor familiar with the area before you met?

Little: *Kate had been to Pendleton and La Grande before but her first visit to Wallowa County was to visit*

me.

Chieftain: Was yours a “long-distance” relationship for a time?

Little: *Kate knew I was living in eastern Oregon and called me in the spring of 1996 for a campaign contribution. I asked her if she was interested in visiting Enterprise to do some hiking and skiing so we planned a trip for her to visit on Saint Patrick’s Day weekend. Unbeknownst to her, someone broke into the backseat of her car during a stop on way and stole a bag with all her clothes and sleeping bag. Her first shopping adventure was to visit the Enterpriser Clothing Store to replenish for the weekend. Unlike many people who live together, then get married, we did the opposite. We spent a year commuting between Portland and Enterprise, got married, and then spent another year doing the same commute until I moved to Portland in 1998.*

Chieftain: Do the two of you ever return to visit the area?

Little: *We have very fond memories of Enterprise and still have many good friends in eastern Oregon so periodically get back there to do some biking, hiking and skiing but we have not been to Enterprise for a while.*

Chieftain: What did you and the governor like best about the Wallowa Valley, and what kind of recreational activities did you and governor enjoy doing while here?

Little: *We really enjoy trekking in the area and have hiked everywhere from the Lower Imnaha River Trail to climbing Ruby Peak, plus numerous hikes up the Lostine and the Wallowa River trails. We’ve also done some cross-country skiing and overnight trips at the Wing Ridge Ski Huts. Joseph of course is always fun to visit for the art and bronze foundries.*

Chieftain: Do you two plan on returning to visit the area in the future?

Little: *As you can imagine, our plans have changed quite a bit lately! I’m sure we’ll make it back to Wallowa County at some point. We both love to travel around Oregon, and she has been doing much more of it over the last several years as part of her previous role as Secretary of State. My birthday present from her this year was a gift certificate to attend one of the Fishtap Writers’ Conferences at Wallowa Lake, so there will definitely be a trip there in the next couple of years!*

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Special thanks to Doctor Helen Carlson at Wallowa Mountain Medical and Lucy Lattin at Home Health for your kindness and understanding of Bettie's wishes and for support to family and caregivers.

Special thanks also to Elsie Evans, Karen Tanzy and Debbie Hafer for providing loving care for Bettie. Also thanks to her friends who attended the celebration of life and all who helped in providing a delicious meal that day.

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