Welcome rescue no matter what

OPEN RANGE

Barrie Qualle

I attended the Caldwell Night Rodeo a couple of weeks ago and thought about the first time I was there. The trip about 20 years ago started at 3:30 a.m. in Oakdale, Calif., loading horses and hitching up the trailer. By 3:45, Jim and I were on our way to pick up Jerold and Leo to head for Caldwell. As we pulled into Jerold's yard, we could see the light in the barn and two horses tied to the hitching rail in the yard.

The plan was to drop our trailer and hook up to Leo's bigger trailer to accommodate the four horses. Naturally since it was dark, it wasn't that simple. The plug that was wired for Jim's trailer didn't match Leo's.

While I held the flashlight, Jerold rewired the plug. Why is it that this job is almost always done in the dark?

It was nearly 5:30 p.m. when we pulled into Caldwell, and the evening performance didn't start until 7:30. This gave us time to put up the horses and get a room.

My traveling companions all placed in the go rounds, and Jerold and Leo made it to the short round the following day. The Camarillo's were flying out to rodeos in Colorado so that left Jim and me free to leave for home the next morning. We fueled up the pickup and met Jim Underwood from Montana to pick up a horse he was sending with us to California.

We made Winnemucca around noon and had lunch in one of its great Basque restaurants. Rodeo cowboys know all the good places in the Western states, and they are not all restaurants.

Since I had driven from Caldwell and felt a nap attack coming on, Jim was driving as we headed west. I woke up around two hours later and noticed the fuel gauge was sitting on red. "You better get fuel in Lovelock," I commented.

"We went past Lovelock about 20 miles ago," Jim replied.

I then asked how long the gauge had been on red, and he thought about 40 miles. About then, we passed a sign that said "Fernley 35 miles." We looked at each other and knew we were sunk. When the Dodge coughed and quit, we were on a flat stretch east of Fernley about 31 miles. The Nevada landscape never looked worse. Jim's approach to this kind of predicament was to sull up and have someone save him, so I got out and stuck out my thumb.

After 10 minutes or so, a van slowed and pulled over. I trotted down the side of the road and opened the passenger side door. "Can you give me a ride to Fernley?" I asked the driver.

"Sure, hop in, and we'll be there in no time," the driver said. I settled in and looked around the van. There was a wheel chair behind the driver, and I noticed that he was using a hand throttle and hand brake. We visited about where we had been and where we were going, and in no time we were pulling into a truck stop on the edge of Fernley.

As I was getting out, I thanked the man for the ride.

"We have to help each other out now and then, even in this tough old world," he replied.

"Well for starters, I won't park in handicapped parking anymore," I said.

"That would be a start," he laughed as he pulled out.

I walked to the truck stop and bought a five-gallon plastic gas can and filled it with diesel. I was wondering how I was going to get back to the rig alongside the road.

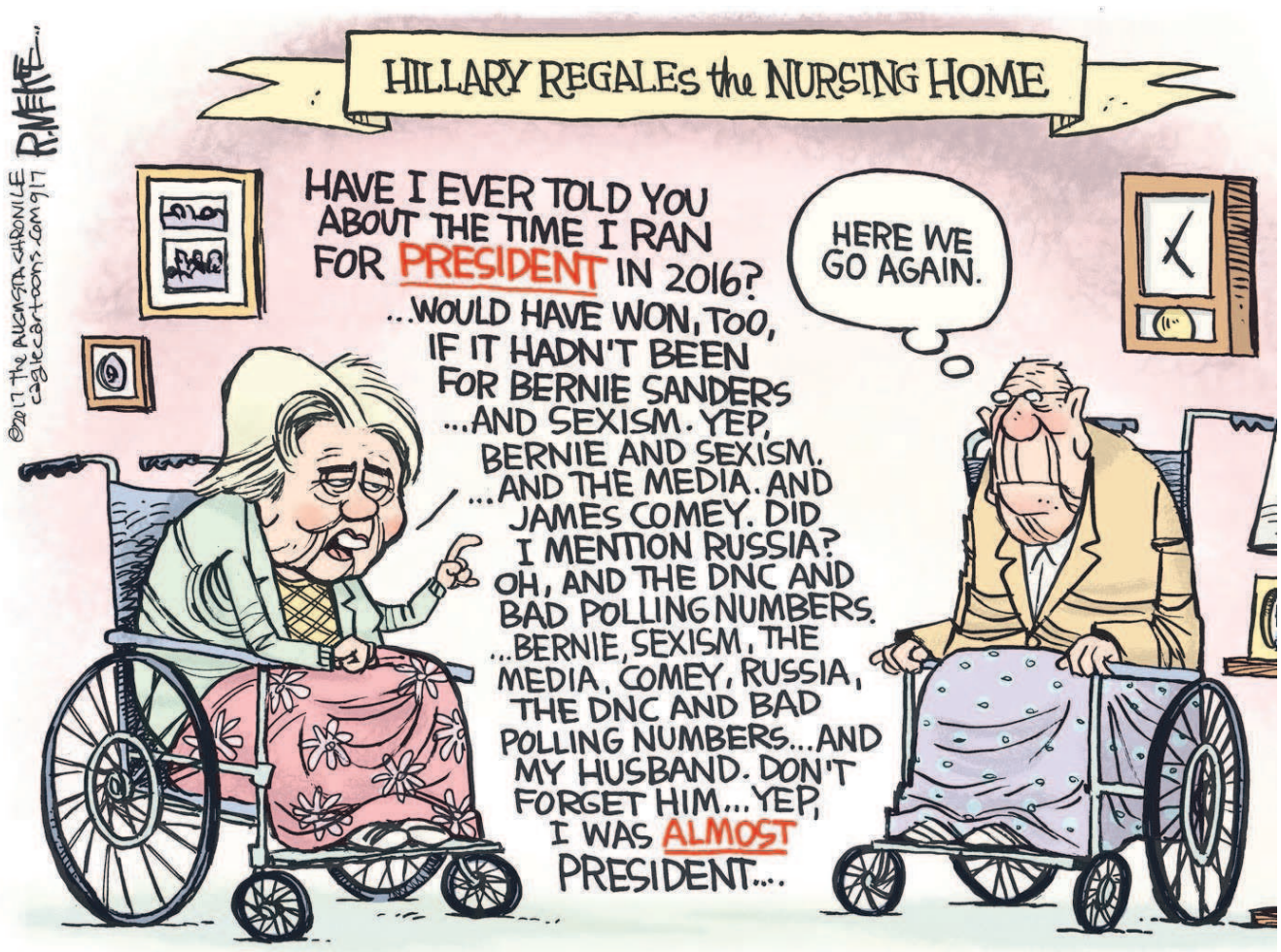
It was then I spotted a familiar face. Carly, a truck driver we had loaded many times was walking toward a loaded cattle truck. I caught up with her, and determined she was heading east on I-80 for Colorado.

I begged a ride and 31 miles to the east we pulled over. Carly said she would wait till we got going before she pulled out in case she needed to radio for help. I crossed the sagebrush median and woke up Jim who had been reading the "Ropers Sport News" instead of the Ram manual on how to restart.

We found the instructions and were told to find the primer pump on the fuel line and pump it 20 times, then crank the engine. After we figured out how to open the hood, we started tracing fuel lines to find the primer. No luck.

By now it had been 20 minutes, and Carly crossed the median to see how we were doing. She disclosed that the lines we were searching for the primer were actually air conditioning lines and not fuel lines. In about 30 seconds, she located the primer and dutifully pumped it and had us successfully on our way. Being rescued by a cripple and a woman could be humbling for some, but we were OK with it and also damn grateful.

Barrie Quallie is a Wallowa County-based columnist for the Chieftain.



Get tough with fire bugs

Paul Wahl/Chieftain

This was the scene in downtown Enterprise Thursday afternoon when smoke from widlfires blotted out the view of the surrounding mountains.

WAHL TO WALL

Paul Wahl

All of my life, I have heard things described as a "breath of fresh air." At no point in my life was that saying more real than Saturday morning sitting on a bench at Enterprise Library and feeling the cool breeze wash over me.

After an inordinately hot summer and a highly smoky on, the coolness was beyond description. For the first time in a long time, I inhaled deeply, my lungs not knowing exactly what to do with newly cleaned air.

The fact that things cooled off and the smoke went away as the Hells Canyon Mule Days parade was about to move through Enterprise may or may not have been a coincidence.

The latest round of smoke seemed to peak on Thursday afternoon when the mountains surrounding Wallowa County completely disappeared. The smoke was fed by wildfires across the region, including the Eagle Creek fire in the Columbia Gorge.

That fire was approaching the 40,000-acre level over the weekend. Sporting events in the area were canceled and outdoor events curtailed for many others. People with breathing conditions stayed inside as much as possible. The rest of us choked and hacked our way through.

The fires sparked even more debate about how forests are being managed in the western United States. Has the cessation of logging meant an unhealthy build-up of fire-prone trees?

It's not an easy question to answer with exactness, but it bears looking into.

The Eagle Creek fire was apparently started by a child playing with fireworks. Investigators are still on the case, but if this juvenile's activities are eventually deemed to be the cause, serious punishment must be forthcoming.

Fireworks in the middle of one of the driest summers on record? Really. Hopefully, charges will be pressed against the parents as well for allowing such stupidity.

There has been a burn ban in Wallowa County most of the summer, yet nearly every set of public safety logs that are faxed to us weekly has an incident in which an open fire has to be extinguished by one of our fire departments.

I know there have been incidents in Joseph and Wallowa. I don't remember seeing one for Enterprise.

I checked in with city administrator Michele Young to see find out what was in store for those who violated the law.

"If our fire department were to be called to put a fire out during a burn ban, we would bill them for the fire department's call, they would get fined and we would turn it over to ODF," Young said.

Enterprise is going to look at even more strict rules at a future date, Young told me.

Good for them. I hope the other two cities have equally strong ordinances in place and that scofflaws are dealt with accordingly.

Can you imagine the damage that could be done if one of those fires were to get out of hand?

A bit of rain fell over much of the county Friday night but not nearly enough for the fire ban to be lifted.

'Geography of Music' a winner in writer's eyes

The year-long efforts of Fishtrap, Josephy Center and Wallowa Valley Music Alliance came to fruition Aug. 24-26 as "The Geography of Music."

The Friday night concert featured amazingly talented musicians from Seattle, Boise, Walla Walla and our own Mark Eubanks and Lauren Guthridge. Sam Collett and Rod Ambroson shared outstanding talent as painters, and Ellen Bishop's words touched our souls as she described this awesome place we call home.

It was one of the most beautiful awe-inspiring concerts I have ever been privileged to attend.

I am sure that even if you thought you didn't like classical music, you would have been mesmerized by classical music beautifully presented in concert with breath-taking pictures of the Snake River.

You would have been captivated to watch Collett and Ambroson create fascinating paintings in front of your eyes as you heard the music of Mozart or Stravinsky.

Eubank's arrange of Bach's "Little Fugue in G Minor" would have had you feeling ever-so thankful to live in Wallowa County.

I understand the dedicated creative volunteers who spent many hours on "Geography of Music" events are already hard at work on the program they plan to present next August.

Please, do yourself a favor, and don't miss it.

Gail Swart
Enterprise

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Letter-writer's claims dismissed as flap-doodle

Jim Akenson's claim that wolves can be forever "habituated" to eating cows is flap-doodle.

What wolves are habituated to is eating meat, big ambulant packages of meat like deer and elk, and in olden days buffalo. Cows fit the bill. But judging from the tiny numbers of cattle killed in, for example, Wallowa County, which has around 40,000 head, wolves decidedly choose wild ungulates over cattle even when cows outnumber natural prey.

Last year's savage winter killed and weakened ungulate populations, meaning fewer offspring. The summer drought added to the dearth of prey.

In these fraught conditions, thousands of unattended cows and calves are turned out in the midst of a wolf pack, many calves looking not much bigger than a wolf. So the wolves eat some.

Ranchers scream for the death of entire packs, using Akenson's fancy that once wolves "flick that switch," they're forever addicted to cow-eating. But wolves aren't flashlights, switched on and off.

They're opportunistic hunters with a clearly demonstrated preference for elk. Where there are more elk, they'll kill fewer cows; and if cows are better protected, they'll eat fewer. But ranchers, always candid about their desire to kill wolves, now smell blood.

Wallowa County, where I live, has one, sometimes two, publicly-funded range-riders to cover an area 40 miles long, mostly rugged timbered public lands. This deterrent can be no more than superficially effective except on open grasslands, mostly private.

Ranchers, especially those grazing public lands, need to make fundamental changes to their business plan. They need to run cows able to defend themselves – cows with horns and the agility to use them; not overweight, hornless critters with stumpy legs.

They need to arrange smaller U.S. Forest Service allotments easier to patrol and move cattle more often between them. They need more butts in the saddle — at their own expense.

They receive from the taxpayer full compensation for loss, free nonlethal tools, heavily subsidized grazing leases, numerous tax breaks and cash subsidies.

Most Oregonians want wolves in the state and are willing to pay for it. Must we also put up with flap-doodle?

Wally Sykes
Joseph

Letters to the Editor are subject to editing and should be limited to 275 words. Writers should also include a phone number with their signature so we can call to verify identity. The Chieftain does not run anonymous letters.

In terms of content, writers should refrain from personal attacks. It's acceptable, however, to attack (or support) another party's ideas. We do not routinely run thank-you letters, a policy we'll consider waiving only in unusual situations where reason compels the exception.

You can submit a letter to the Wallowa County Chieftain in person; by mail to P.O. Box 338, Enterprise, OR 97828; by email to editor@wallowa.com; or via the submission form at the newspaper's website, located at wallowa.com. (Drop down the "Opinion" menu on the navigation bar to see the relevant link).

WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN

USPS No. 665-100

P.O. Box 338 • Enterprise, OR 97828
Office: 209 NW First St., Enterprise, Ore.
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Wallowa County's Newspaper Since 1884
Enterprise, Oregon

Member Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association

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Published every Wednesday by:
EO Media Group

Periodical Postage Paid at Enterprise and additional mailing offices

Subscription rates (includes online access)	1 Year
Wallowa County	$40.00
Out-of-County	$57.00

Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

See the Wallowa County Chieftain on the Internet
Wallowa.com
facebook.com/Wallowa | twitter.com/wcchieftain

POSTMASTER — Send address changes to
Wallowa County Chieftain
P.O. Box 338
Enterprise, OR 97828

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Volume 134