

Remembering a cowboy — Sonny Tureman

You know how you get those phone calls where no name shows up, and it’s usually some telemarketer. I got one of those a while ago and instead of ignoring it, I answered.

A young man at the other end asked if this were Barrie Qualle, mis-pronouncing Qualle. When you have the name Qualle, you get used to that and answer to Quail or Quall also.

It is a tip-off that this person doesn’t know you. Rather than hang up immediately, I affirmed that was me. What he said next caught my attention.

“My name is Matt Foster and I understand that Sonny Tureman was a friend of yours,” he said. I perked up and confirmed that I had cow-boyed with Sonny in California.

He went on and said that he had read a column in the Chieftan that I wrote and mentioned Sonny. His dad, who lives in Walla Walla, had read it and forwarded it to him. He then went on and revealed that he was Sonny’s grandson and his dad was Sonny’s son.

His dad had met Sonny once, and Matt had never met him. This was getting pretty interesting. Sonny wasn’t one to discuss personal things with any of us that knew him.



OPEN RANGE
Barrie Qualle

Matt continued and asked if I could fill him in on what I knew of Sonny. We talked for about 30 minutes and ended with agreement to get together and continue the discussion.

Just to fill you in, Sonny grew up in John Day and later became a world-champion bronc rider, winning several of the big ones like Cheyenne. Sonny not only could ride broncs, he could calf rope and team rope with the best. He was also the hardest man I ever knew. He knew no fear.

A week later I got a text from Matt who was on business in Baker and he wanted to drop by the next day to visit. The next morning, a young man about 30 showed up and looked enough like Sonny he didn’t have to tell me who he was.

We visited a while, and I remembered that Ray Zannuto had told me his neighbor Merle Hawkins had a saddle that Sonny won in 1941 at the Pendleton Roundup. I mentioned this and the kid lit up and eagerly asked



if we could go see it and get some pictures.

I phoned Ray and asked if he could contact Merle and arrange the meeting. Ray called back five minutes later and told us to come by and he would take us down to see Merle.

All the way to Wallowa, I was hoping this wasn’t a wild goose chase and Merle might show us a dried up old saddle with no assurance it was one Sonny had won. When we arrived at Merle’s, we found Merle temporarily confined to a wheel chair.

He told us the saddle was upstairs and for us to go get it and bring it down. We found the saddle and brought it downstairs. After looking it over, I was almost as thrilled as Matt

The saddle had a plaque on the cantle that read “won by Sonny Tureman.” It was an old Hamley, the kind they have always presented at Pendleton, and to Merle’s credit, he had kept the saddle in great condition.

He had replaced a little of the riggin but the rest was original and in using condition. Matt began taking pictures of the saddle, and I took a couple of him holding it. Matt was full of questions, and Merle told us what he knew of the history of the saddle.

Merle had bought the saddle at a horse sale for \$138. He didn’t know who owned it and said it was covered with dust and bird droppings when he got it. He cleaned it up, oiled it and

has used it since the ‘60s. Matt said he would love to have the saddle and asked Merle if he would sell it. Merle hopes to be back in the saddle soon and declined to sell. I hope that works out for him, but if he ever does sell it, no one would appreciate having it more than Matt.

A few days later Matt sent me a picture he found of Sonny holding the saddle the day he won it. It would be interesting to know the route the old saddle took finding its way to Wallowa County. I discussed this with my friend Bill McCullough who lived with Sonny for a couple of years, and he said Sonny could have gotten low on funds and sold it or probably just gave it to a friend. Sonny travelled light and won lots of saddles.

I told Matt that Sonny was such an interesting guy that someone should write a book about him. He answered that he was working on that project and collecting as much information as he could. I asked him what he would call the book. “The Cowboy I Never Knew.”

Barrie Qualle is an all-around working ranch hand, author and ranch rodeo enthusiast. He lives in Wallowa County.

‘The Post’ misses an important concept

On a recent trip to Portland, I had the opportunity to see the movie “The Post.” For a life-long newspaper guy, it was interesting to see the inner workings of a portion of the industry portrayed.

While the movie didn’t get it right all of the time, it was an engaging story and one with a significant message — Is the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution worth defending?

The movie tells the story of the Washington Post’s decision to publish what was known at the time as the “Pentagon Papers.” Within the pages was a long web of details that revealed the United States had known for decades a war in Vietnam was unwinnable and folly.

Yet administration after administration kept pushing forward with the idea until 1975 when American forces were withdrawn, and South Vietnam was gobbled up by North Vietnam and reunited.

The papers were leaked by Daniel Ellsberg,

who dug them out of files maintained by his private-sector employer at the time — clearly a crime. The movie glosses over that fact with an “ends justifies the means” wave of the hand.

The script also failed to mention that Ellsberg was a troubled character who had issues of his own that might have cast some of his activity in a less favorable light.

He was convicted on federal charges and could have spent 100 years in prison. A judge overturned his conviction.

But the most glaring problem for me was the emphasis on the plight of the Washington Post and its future while the First Amendment was barely a footnote. Publishing or not publishing the leaked documents was the ultimate test of the First Amendment, and the U.S. Supreme Court got it right.

The public has a right to know what its government at all levels is up to. In my view, the First Amendment should have been the star of the movie and not necessarily the Washington Post and its foibles.

I was hoping against hope that at some point Meryl Streep playing Katherine Graham or Tom Hanks playing Ben Bradlee would have looked into the camera and said: “It’s a no-brainer. Publishing is protected by the U.S. Constitution, the greatest document ever conceived for governing a people.”

Alas, there is no such line in the movie. The concept isn’t even mentioned.

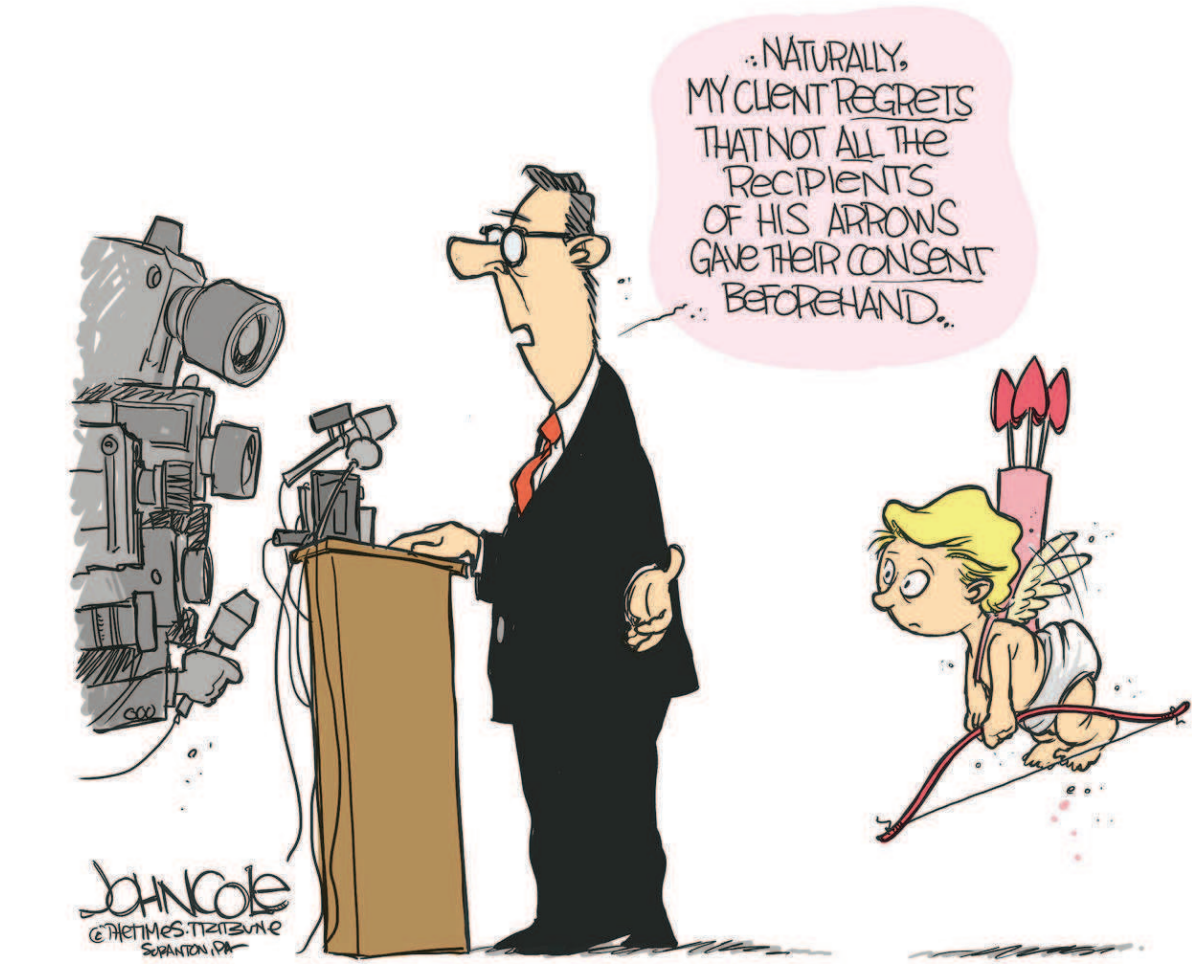
From my first days as a reporter, the rights granted in the Constitution to the press were part of my daily training, but another huge part was the responsibility that came with those rights.

The failure of the media to be responsible has probably done more to harm the institution in recent years than any other single factor.

Remember when you were a kid and a random adult (perhaps a teacher) told you to do something. Your response was “you’re not my mother, I don’t have to listen to you.”

That’s how the press (television, radio, online and everyone else) views responsibility to the Constitution today. Every time I hear someone say “I have a right to ...” or “I want my rights ...” I shudder. Because you also have a responsibility. But that’s never mentioned.

Overall, “The Post” is a movie worth seeing, but unless you’re a student of American history, it is easy to walk away with the wrong message. That said, movies produced in Hollywood have never been the place to learn history accurately. They’re “entertainment,” which relieves them of the need to be responsibly accurate.



Elk remain a scourge for ranchers

I participated in the educational elk meetings hosted by Mike and Pam Harshfield.

First of all, the meeting was taken out of their hands, and the district attorney took over.

The meeting consisted of what landowners can and can’t do to protect their lands from elk.

The district attorney also talked about all the programs ODFW has to offer landowners.

When all is said and done, it boils down to this. Even if the landowner participated in all the programs, it still doesn’t cover the huge monetary losses caused by elk to their haystacks, crops, fields, pastures, rangeland and fences.

Reasonably, the state should be held accountable for those losses.

Casey Tippet
Joseph

Time for WURA to get on board with upgrades

With the beginning of the coming excursion train season almost upon us, I feel it is important to convey to the Wallowa Union Rail Authority concerns that the Friends of the Joseph Branch Board have regarding the financial and maintenance status of our very valuable railroad assets.

It is safe to say that the board is increasingly frustrated by the lack of ability on the part of the WURA to not only maintain the right-of-way (and thus continue to preserve this historic line) but to find the funding necessary to do this.

Up to this point, it seems to us that the

LETTERS to the EDITOR

WURA board and railroad managers just simply lack the initiative to get anything done with regard to preserving and maintaining this railroad line. We would hope that WURA would be more proactive and aggressive in finding solutions (which are out there) to keeping this railroad up to an operating standard that we can all be proud of.

The FOJB always stands by ready to assist in any way possible but it is WURA that has the responsibility to take the leadership in this effort. So far, it seems the WURA board are simply willing to settle for the status quo while letting the line gradually deteriorate.

It puts the FOJB board in the position of explaining, year after year, to our friends in Wallowa County why their train is not serving them. We are getting tired of this and the lack of communication about what the intentions are with this railroad really are.

What are the plans for going after the funding necessary to maintain this railroad line to not just adequate but minimum Federal Rail Authority standards? What are the plans for repairing and re-rating the bridges (Minam, Water Canyon and near Enterprise) and having them inspected? Also, what the timeline to accomplish these projects?

What plans do you have for returning the train to Wallowa County sooner rather than later?

We are tired of the lack of vision and communication about WURA’s inten-

tions for the future of this wonderful and historic railroad line. The FOJB have done their part over the years to build an excellent excursion train operation, which compares well with some of the best short lines of its kind in the United States, but we continue to be hamstrung in developing an even better operation by this lack of action.

In the interest of good communication and transparency, we believe it is time for the Wallowa Union Railroad Authority to step up to the plate and make public a renewed vision for the future of this railroad.

David Arnold
La Grande
Arnold is vice-president of Friends of the Joseph Branch, which operates the Eagle Cap Excursion Train out of Elgin.

Resentful about paying my federal taxes

As I work on my taxes for this year, I am reminded that I have been paying taxes for 70 years, since I was 17 years old. I recognize that taxes are necessary as the price of civilization, including police and fire departments, roads, clean air and water, education, protection from disease, promoting the advancement of science (computers and massive food production).

I always felt good about paying my fair share of taxes for the privilege of living in a country where citizens, at least, get a chance to succeed. I also felt good about serving our country in the U. S.

See LETTERS, Page A5