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# SMOKE SIGNALS

A Publication of the Grand Ronde Tribe

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## New Year, New Millennium, New Beginning

### Local couple gets another chance at life.

**Tribal member  
Bob Mercier goes to  
the edge, looks over.**



By Brent Merrill

Life is precious. What matters most in life are the people you are closest to, the people you know you can count on. When former Grand Ronde Tribal Council member Bob Mercier found out he needed a new kidney he took a moment out of his busy life to wonder what was ahead. What turns would life take? Where would he and his wife Gayle be in a year from now? Two years from now? Did he even get to think about the future? With their grandchildren sprouting

like weeds in a field, Bob and Gayle, married for 38 years, never blinked. They never stopped living. They never surrendered to the temptation of wondering what could happen after years of dealing with Bob's diabetes and now this.

"We just went right on," said Gayle. "We didn't stop. We still went to work. You know, we still did everything. We had our bad days. We were in the hospital a lot. But, we just went on."

When he knew he was really in trouble with the kidney failure, the family and doctors turned to Bob's sister Bonnie Tom to find a matching kidney and the new chance at life that Bob was clinging to.

Bob is the son of Tribal Elder Joe "Sonny" Mercier and the late Blandine Holmes, the brother of Bonnie Tom, Carol Olson and Jeff Mercier, the father of Teri Mercier and the grandfather of Ali, Keiffer and Zoey.

"It (the kidney problems) came on kind of gradually in the first part of 1999," said Bob. "It was in July of 1999 when I really got in trouble with it. The kidney just almost quit functioning at that time. After a lot of testing, I started dialysis in July."

Dialysis is a treatment that creates a kidney outside of the body. The dialysis machine works as a filter, removing excess fluid and toxins in the blood. The dialysis machine takes the blood out of the body close to a hundred times and filters it back in a four-hour period of time.

Bob said the dialysis machine was helpful but, not a way of life.

"It just came on gradually until it got to the point where I didn't feel well any of the time," said Bob. "It progressively got worse until we started dialysis and that helped. But it still, to me, wasn't the answer to be hooked to that machine."

Bob said he grew tired of the process of dialysis quickly and he began to despise the treatments.

"I hated every minute of it," said Bob in a strong voice. "Because you are there for four hours and you don't move. You just sit there and let the machine do its job. For a person that is active, it is kind of a bad situation. The home dialysis was done through the evening. You would hook up the machine at night at about 8:30 p.m. and then stay on it until 6:30 a.m. It filtered you all night. At least you had your all day freedom."

Home dialysis is called Peritoneal

dialysis. Dialysis that can only be done at a kidney center is called Hemodialysis.

Bob started his treatments in Salem, but then was allowed to do them at home. He said he appreciated not having to go to the hospital to get his treatment.

"That was a lot better," said Gayle in a whisper. "That was a lot better for him."

Bonnie was a willing participant and tests were conducted. It didn't take long for her to decide she wanted to help.

"I felt scared and sick," said Bonnie when she found out about her brother's worsening condition. "Because you just don't know... You don't really know ahead of time what is going to happen. So you just feel sick inside because what are the chances of finding a donor? You know, what is the chance of finding a match? So, you don't really know what is going to happen. So, I think the first reaction is pretty nerve racking."

"I just knew from the beginning, I just felt like that was what was meant to be," explained Bonnie. "That is why it was such a shock when I found

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Photo by Brent Merrill  
**STACKED UP** — Snow dusted Grand Ronde and the entire West Valley on Monday, December 10 and snarled traffic on Highway 18 as a result. The snow lasted a brief, but eventful 48 hours.

## Tribal Families Celebrate the Season...



Photo by Mychal Leno  
Tribal Council hosted the Annual Tribal Christmas party on Saturday, December 9 at the Grand Ronde Community Center. Approximately 240 people made their way inside to be greeted by festive decorations and the smell of holiday food. A meal was shared and Santa was there for the children. Before and After School Care and Head Start children sang and entertained the guests. Fruit baskets, prepared by Leonette Galligher, and Poinsettias were given away as door prizes throughout the day.

*More Holiday Photos on pages 6 & 7*

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