

46 different states

done that were important to me.”

Out of all the places she has lived, VanAtta loves Oregon and, specifically, Grand Ronde the most.

“Whenever I go places and tell people where I’m from, they say, ‘Oh, doesn’t it rain there all the time?’ I reply, ‘Every single day,’ ” she jokes. “I’ll take the rain over the violence larger cities have.”

The move to Grand Ronde was prompted by health issues, but looking back, VanAtta says it has been a “pretty amazing” experience.

“Most people think the only thing to Grand Ronde is the casino,” she says. “I say, you haven’t even seen it. It is pretty amazing out there. You don’t have to go anywhere to be in the mountains.”

VanAtta enjoys how Grand Ronde has many of the conveniences of a larger city, but without the crowds.

“I always tell people we have churches, health care, our own library, classes, housing and the Elders Activity Center,” she says. “Every day you have the chance to learn something different, meet new people and try new things.”

Within a month of moving to Grand Ronde, VanAtta says she knew she had found a home.

“We just jumped in and got in-

volved, and soon we had a busload of friends,” she says. “Of all the places I have lived, this is my favorite. I truly believe this is where I belong. It is a good thing.”

She enjoys talking with younger Tribal members and asking them about their post-high school plans. “They have so many amazing opportunities now,” she says.

VanAtta says she’s always given the advice to young women to make sure they can support themselves no matter what life may throw at them. For those who will soon be a part of the older generation, she recommends staying busy.

“You can have the best experience being here if it is about the giving, not the taking,” she says. “You have to stay busy. I fight memory loss and shakiness at times, but sitting around doesn’t help.”

Once a heavy drinker, VanAtta stopped when she moved to Grand Ronde.

“I just didn’t feel the need anymore,” she says. “You always have an option. Your friends that partied with you, they are down there and that is where they want to keep you, in the gutter. ... God gave you a mind. Use it and always be grateful.” ■



Tribal Elder Jennie VanAtta’s grandparents Rose and Floyd “Bud” Low helped raise her and were very influential in her life.

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