

The Chatterbox

Betty's 20 years of Sentinel memories

BY BETTY KAISER
For the Sentinel

My, how time flies! This month I am celebrating an unplanned, 20-year career in the newspaper industry. It all began in 1996 when I walked through the front door of the Sentinel and applied for an office job that they were advertising. I knew absolutely nothing about office work...but how hard could it be? Talk about chutzpah!

Nevertheless, Publisher Jody Rolnick decided to take a chance on this older newbie. On June 9, 1996 I entered a new world. My colleagues, Retta and Rosie, and I were busy. We answered phones, fielded questions and complaints and forwarded calls to the appropriate ad or newsperson. All classified ads and bills were written by hand, as were subscription receipts. Those went into notebook files. I loved the office buzz and meeting new people.

My job description was: Accounts Payable. I remember thinking, "How hard could this be?" I managed our checkbook at home, and it always balanced. Enter a new animal—the computer. Gulp. Let's just say that I was a slow learner, and there's a special place in heaven for those who were my instructors. But I did learn and that experience began my love affair with computers today.

So how did I morph from the front office to the newsroom?

Well, I've always loved writing. I grew up in the era of Emily Post and would write a thank-you note as soon as a gift was opened. In school, essay tests were a breeze. Put me on a committee and I would end up secretary or writing a "how-to-do-the-job" manual. In college I had taken some journalism classes and written for the campus paper, but that was the extent of my formal experience.

Jody and I would occasionally talk about the need for a column on people, parties, places to go, things to do, celebrations, recipes, etc. — sort of a hybrid commentary, old-fashioned local gossip column. News staff was not available for that sort of thing, so I volunteered.

The Chatterbox debuted on April 7, 1999. In that column I requested the public's input. I was counting on them to be my eyes and ears in the extended Cottage Grove community. I started sharing my life experiences and readers responded

with stories of their own. Thus the adventure began.

Originally, ABC/Disney owned the Sentinel. Later it was sold to Lee Enterprises. Then, Editor Finn John came aboard. He was young, enthusiastic, energetic and full of ideas! One of his visions for the newspaper was to include an old-fashioned society page level of hometown news. I was already writing the Chatterbox, so he brought me from the front office into the newsroom.

Suddenly my job morphed from one to three columns a week—The Chatterbox, Cook's Corner and Neighborhood News. We often had a full page of military news, graduation lists, anniversaries and weddings. Eventually I added the monthly Faith Page and started covering news stories as well. It was one of the best times of my life.

I loved telling our town's stories. Interesting things happen in our corner of the world. Some good. Some bad. Some ugly. Lee Enterprises published my columns on the Internet, and I started hearing from people around the world. Wow. That was fun.

One of the most memorable stories I covered was Uno, a German Shepherd and his handler, Pat Gartman. A certified crisis response dog, he and Pat, with Bill as support, flew to Ground Zero after the 9/11 tragedy. The core temperature at the attack site was 1,800 degrees. The workers were numb, tired, dirty, grieving, expressionless and overwhelmed with the enormous task. Pat said, "Uno would pick the one who needed the most comfort. He'd put his head in the worker's lap and inevitably, the worker would start petting him, talking to him, holding him. Uno's back would be wet with tears." I cry every time I remember that story.

I prefer to write good news, but reporting an ugly situation won me a First Place Social Issues award in 2004 from the Society of Professional Journalists. My three-part series on homeless teens was titled, "Under the Bridge," and it opened the public's eyes to the needs of these hurting, invisible teens and those in organizations like Parent Partnership who work on their behalf.

I briefly retired in 2006 during a time of turmoil when my husband had a very serious back surgery. At that time, my friend and editor Jonni Gratton summed up my eclectic style and newsroom career:



Sentinel file photo

Betty Kaiser began her career with the Sentinel in the accounts payable department in 1996, though she found her niche as a columnist and storyteller, documenting the lives and times of the unique characters of Cottage Grove.

"Betty Kaiser was a big city California girl who moved to the country in 1989 and settled into the groove of the Grove.

"She put her heart and soul into everything that she wrote — good, bad, funny or bitter-sweet. She wrote from the heart about every segment of local life and her own experiences — from bats in the bedroom, a Saginaw slum, homeless teens, falling off ladders, women in the military, the tragic death of children and bad hair days.

A born-and-bred Grover once told her "that she wrote like one of us."

"Readers enjoyed bantering with Betty — correcting her Spanish, disagreeing with her politics and banning her from their hair salons.

Mostly, they just opened their hearts and told her their stories."

For all of the above reasons and more, I wasn't very good at retirement. I returned to work in 2007 on a part-time basis writing one column a week. That has since been reduced to every other week, which is just about my speed for this stage of life.

As my 20-year career winds down to a crawl, I am so grateful to those who helped me along this path and the readers who supported me. I was a stranger and you took me into your hearts, sharing your stories and lives. It has been a wonderful relationship. Lord willing, I plan to continue doing this as long as I am able and making sense.

So, Cottage Grove, thanks for the memories and keep them coming!

Betty Kaiser's Chatterbox is about people, places, family, and other matters of the heart. Contact her at 942-1317 or via e-mail — bchatty@bettykaiser.com

Curves
Get strong + STAY STRONG

- Body Balance
- Arms-Core-Legs
- Dance and Tone
- Curves Circuit with Jillian Michaels

Our All-New Boxing Class is Here!
Strength + Balance + Cardio + Core
All in 30 Minutes

1133 E. Main Street, Cottage Grove
www.curves.com **541.942.9580**

Grove Medical Equipment
"BUILDING A HEALTHY COMMUNITY"

- OXYGEN • SLEEP THERAPY
- WHEEL CHAIRS • HOSPITAL BEDS
- WALK AIDS • SPECIALTY FITTINGS
- SALES AND RENTALS
- INSURANCE BILLING FOR SALES AND RENTALS

541-225-5443 148 Gateway Blvd
grovemmedical@outlook.com (B Mart Plaza)
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

Drip Irrigation and Sprinkler Systems in Stock.

BOYCE & SONS
LANDSCAPE AND BUILDING MATERIALS
Open 7 days a week!
79149 N. River Road
541-942-4664

U-HAUL AUTHORIZED DEALER

2015 Cottage Grove Chamber of Commerce Business of the Year

LOW COST
Local & Metro Weekday Trips
Professional Caring Staff

South Lane
Wheels
Your Regional Public Transportation Service

No eligibility requirements.
541-942-0456
southlanewheels.org

NEW: Digital X-Rays (use less radiation)

Implants • Teeth Whitening • Extractions
Lumineers (no prep veneers as seen on TV)

Cottage Grove Dental
Dr. Brent Bitner, DDS
350 Washington, Cottage Grove (behind Better Bodies)
541.942.7934

Territorial Seed Company
Since 1979

- The Northwest's Finest Gardening Seed
- Flowers, Herbs, & Shrubs
- Vegetable Transplants
- Fruit Trees

20 Palmer Ave. Cottage Grove (541) 942-0510

VFW 4TH OF JULY PICNIC & RAFFLE

PICNIC: July 4, 2016 12:00 pm – 5:00 pm
at the VFW (3160 Hillside Drive-CG)

FOOD FOR SALE: CHICKEN, Prepared by Big Stuff Barbeque
Hot Dogs, Chips & Salads soft drinks, coffee & tea
(No Alcohol, drugs or fireworks allowed)

MUSIC: The Country Classic Band, "Anderson Family & Friends"
12:30pm – 4:30 pm

DEDICATION PROGRAM: 2:00 pm

RAFFLE
Over \$2000. Worth of Donations To Give Away!
Provided by the Merchants of Cottage Grove

- Chest freezer with beef included donated by Brad's Cottage Grove
- Dinners • Car Services • Massages • Gift Certificates • Golf
- Health Club Workouts and much more. All this can be yours for just \$2.00 per raffle ticket 3 for \$5.00 or 7 for \$10.00 you do not have to be present to win the winner will be notified by phone or mail

541-942-7099 All proceeds go to our Veterans Supporting Veterans Program

YARD SALE

GIANT YARD SALE
Delight Valley Church of Christ
33087 Saginaw Road E.
Exit 176 off of I-5

Date: Saturday June 25, 2016
Vendor set up: 8am – 9am
Sales from: 9am – 3pm

Bring your stuff, sell it, and make a buck!
No Charge to vendors, bring a table or two!

Please remember we are a Church, so bringing old Playboy magazines would be un-cool...Thanks
Phone: 541-942-7711 or 541-517-8493

Our Youth Group will be selling Hot Dogs n' Pop For a Fundraiser

Delight Valley Church of Christ