Darr shares journey 'From City Lights to Majestic View'

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — Deb Darr lives on a farm in Falls City. She has animals, tends a large garden, cans, bakes, and does all the things a farm woman does. You may never guess she was from the bustling Bay Area.

"One of the nicest things said to me, I was talking to somebody not so long ago, and I was telling her that I was in the process of getting this book published," Darr said. "I said I'm from the Bay Area. She said, 'Really? I would never have imagined you there.' So maybe I've made the grade. Maybe I am accepted as a farm woman."

Darr recently published a book, "From City Lights to Majestic View," detailing her and her family's journey.

"The book has a lot of humor in it, especially on us, because, frankly, we were the dumbest greenhorns that you could ever have known, because we knew zip. Nothing at all," she said.

But something had to change for the Darr family 40 years ago, living in a little suburbia tract house in the Bay Area.

"The smog is so terrible, it just hangs and hangs," she said. "And the congestion."

The family's house was situated near a gas station. During a time of gas-rationing, the line of cars waiting to fill up wrapped around the corner and blocked the Darr's driveway.

"We couldn't even get out of our driveway to get to work because people had come and stayed overnight," she said.

The Darrs wanted something more open, greener, closer to the earth.

EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

Deb Darr shares her family's journey from living in the city to moving to the country.

"We wanted something that would be more healthy for us," Darr said. "When we moved, we had one child, and he was a baby then." They wanted something healthier for him, too.

They sold their home and a duplex in the Bay Area and were Oregon bound.

"We spent several months looking at property — and this was before internet, it was an all-day thing, going from one side of the county to the other," Darr said. "We gave up looking and rented a property on Levens Street in Dallas. We figured we were just going to chill."

Then she saw a classified ad in the *Itemizer-Observer*: 35 acres and a home for $30,000.

"That seems like nothing now, but 40 some-odd years ago, that was still not a lot — substantial, but it was something we could probably afford," she said.

They went with a realtor to look at the place. It was a homestead, with additions built with what the owners had, when they could afford it.

"This place was not like a custom-built home at all," Darr recalled.

The door frame was misshapen. Wires dangled from the light switch to the lamp. The floor slanted, the result of using burnt timber for floor joists. The home didn't even have a real address — rather, directions were given using two broken-down cars in the field as a landmark. In spite of all this, the Darrs were sold.

"We were foaming at the mouth," she said. "We could do this. We had youth on our side and the burning desire to make a go of something that, well, when my parents came to see it, they were like, 'What have you done!'"

It took some time to calm her mother's nerves when she first visited the Darr's slice of backwoods paradise.

Looking back, Darr confides her disappointments with the decision. Because of the way the land is zoned, and decisions of the Polk County government, it can't be parceled out to leave as inheritance to her children.

While it's much improved, 40 years ago, the Falls City School District was lacking, Darr said. And, though it doesn't seem far on paper, they are 15 minutes from anything — on backroads. With snowy winters.

"This book could probably have been three times the thickness, but I figured I better get it done, because I am 67, and only God knows what tomorrow brings," she said.

Darr wrote the book with her grandchildren in mind, so they would get an idea of what their parents and grandparents went through.

"You really learn to depend on yourself a lot more," she said. "I think at times it was frustrating. There's so many things you learn, living and doing, and the good news is, we planted and still do plant a really good sized garden. I do canning like you wouldn't believe."

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