

Q&A

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Googled my name to see if my book came up – I discovered I'm an actress who makes movies where the clothing budget is unnecessary. That was a shock.

Q. "Rides Again" tells more tales of your life with Phil in the country, but also focuses on the strong friendships you've had. How did you decide to take that tack?

A. It must have been difficult for our neighbors, because who could identify with two-ex hippies, even if the hippies were clean and drug-free?

I guess it evolved, and I purposely went that direction, too. So many writers say "write what you know" – I followed that advice. It seemed like a good learning experience.

In the city, people can pick and choose friends based on lots of reasons like age, occupation, hobbies, and personality traits. In the country it's more like a family, with fewer people who share those things. So, we tended to gravitate toward people based on occupation. Everything else that comes with friendship came later. Although I confess to being a lousy neighbor and friend – I'm a fairly private person.

Q. So what's it like to write about the real people in your life?

A. It's challenging. One reason is my respect for the people. They aren't perfect (although Phil and

I are darned close; grin) and they have bad days, months, years. My main goal is writing happy, feel-good, positive prose.

Ranchers are interesting. What they do is fascinating. How they do it is incredible and brave.

Readers need to know how hard ranchers work. It's not a 9 to 5 job – they are on the job all the time. It's a hands-on business. Loss of an animal, whether livestock or helpers like horses or dogs, happens all the time.

They always have to make decisions on the fly. This is the biggest reason I wanted to write about them. Respect.

Q. Have you ever thought about trying your hand at fiction?

A. Yup, and I think I'd be better at it than non-fiction.

The big problem with fiction is it's a puzzle where everything has to fit at the end of the day. Puzzles or riddles mystify me.

With a memoir, as soon as I found out I could embellish, I was on board. Embellish, with a core of truth, is my middle name.

Q. Even as you write about adventures, misadventures, even calamities, the strongest thread is humor. Are we seeing a bit of your philosophy of life here?

A. Oh yeah. My saving grace. I don't know how other people handle life's detritus – I'm throwing that word in to impress people – but humor's worked for me.

My dad had a dry wit

and I envied it. Phil and I have made it through some rough times because we handled it with humor. Humor is a blessing and a reward, like the fresh cream rising above the milk.

In the '80s, I was a big fan of Saturday Night Live on television – I would have flown to New York to audition, but I was in my 30s and married. I'd just missed the boat.

Not saying I was funny but what the comedians did on the show rang true to me. Those programs are rare. Wikipedia says humor is the tendency of particular cognitive experiences to provoke laughter and provide amusement.

Yep.

Q. After all this time in the country, do you still consider yourself a city slicker, or is the cowgirl part starting to take hold?

A. Well, since I'm a scaredy-cat about almost everything, I still qualify as a city slicker, but, I strongly identify with a few rural mindsets. Defending myself is one of those, and it seems like a cowgirl-type thing.

For example, a few years ago when the state police were on a manhunt out here looking for a local guy, this Portland news crew came out to interview people, asking them if they were scared. One older fellow – probably my age now – was sitting back comfortably in his lounge and on a table inches away from his hand was a huge revolver.

"Nope," he said, "I'm

not scared at all."

And that's only one thing. When Phil and I married in '68, we wanted to work together. In the country, lots of families work together seven days a week. This was one of the similarities that helped us out here.

Q. Your books have drawn praise, locally and beyond – the first one nominated for a nonfiction award back in 2008. Did you always want to be an author?

A. How nice – I still feel inept. But no, I had no idea writing was in my future.

When we moved to Izee, Phil started keeping a journal. An elder lady neighbor told him it was necessary to be able to look back and check facts, projects, time lines. It made sense so he did it, and then I started my own. Often we'd compare notes. I'd double-check his and he'd look at mine to fill in gaps. I'm embarrassed to say mine overflowed with angst and drama while Phil's had precise, to-the-point facts. I'd write, "Why is it so hot? The horse almost bucked me off today! Why is my hair so goofy today?"

Q. Living on a cattle ranch, a busy place, how do you find time to write?

A. I'm a late bloomer. Started college at 41 and finished when I was 47. Since I was already used to taking time to study, I fit writing into those time slots.

Before school and after I started writing, I helped with ranch chores

like building and mending fences, riding, calving, driving the truck while we looked for our cows in the forest, helping feed in the winter, branding, and probably a thousand more little jobs. My notebook was always with me. While I was going to school, Phil did most of those things alone. It depended on the situation.

Q. So is there a third book in your future?

A. Probably. Not sure I'm done with ranch stories so I might write a third "Accidental Cowgirl." But, for a few years now, I've had an idea to write a scary book. Humor and terror go together like a peanut butter and dill pickle sandwich. It's the best combination.

Movies like "Slither," "Jaws," "Fearless Vampire Killers," "Lost Boys,"

"American Werewolf in London" ... All of these are silly and fun but scary, too.

My book would involve cattle, of course.

That's all I'll say because someone will likely steal my idea because it's so good. Or, maybe not and maybe it isn't.

Note: Readers may have to wait for St. Clair's scary cattle story, but her "Accidental Cowgirl" books can be found at Chester's, the Grant County Library and the Outpost in John Day; the Grant County Historical Museum in Canyon City; the Bowman Museum in Prineville; and The Round Barn in Diamond. And watch for her ebook versions on Amazon.com.

Anyone who would like to offer her books in the local area can contact her at rizzdolie@gmail.com.

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JD Liquor store moving into Chester's

Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY – The John Day Liquor Store is on the move.

Fran Holmstrom, the liquor agent, is retiring next month after 28 years with the outlet.

The storefront on North Canyon Boulevard will close May 11, and reopen May 13 inside Chester's Thriftway on Main Street.

Chester's announced the addition this week. The store's service center area will be remodeled to accommodate the liquor store,

which will offer nearly twice the variety, officials said.

The store not only will offer a larger selection but will be open more days in the new location, with hours of 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. seven days a week.

Chester's also is making other changes, including an express checkout lane for customers with just a hand basket or armful of items, and kitchen upgrades in the deli, including new hot and cold cases and beverage center.



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