

Through Avis Rust's Garden Gate

By Judy Hays-Eberts

“I’ve got a good attitude about myself,” Avis Rust said at the conclusion of our visit. “I’m not up to health standards, but...” She does real good.

Many might know Avis Rust through the *Noti News*, a short weekly column she writes for the *West Lane News*, in which she shares the happenings of her life and the church she attends and the small community of Noti off of Hwy 126 (since the highway was moved in 1996), five miles west of Veneta. Her piece always begins with something like, “A rusty gate is open for news.” I’d wondered about who she was, though, because I hadn’t seen a photo of her (that I remembered). Yet, a picture is what brought us together.

Two issues ago, *Groundwaters* published a story about local poet Elizabeth Tyler Brown by Claire Hutton titled *Memoirs of a Pineapple Bride*. A photo of Elizabeth was included. While a number of people commented about the story and Elizabeth’s experiences in Hawaii before and during WWII, Avis was struck by the photo. In it, Elizabeth looks much like Avis. And, they both share a love of writing as a form of self-expression. Avis loves poems but is not a poet; she has kept a diary since 1960.

Her column in the *News* is a slim example of how much Avis writes every day. The column is condensed for space with a word limit. It’s most generally about people she knows and what’s going on. Meanwhile, Avis’ diaries are neatly handwritten and extensive, and are true treasures. Unlike her bits of *Noti News*, Avis has filled the pages of many notebooks with recollections of her youth and notes about subjects of interest such as botany. Avis Rust is actually a woman of many talents, including gardening. Her diary contains an immense amount of information that is clearly and simply explained. I took notes about how she and her family came to Oregon, but I discovered that Avis had already written it down quite concisely herself. Therefore, I encouraged her to share some of her work in *Groundwaters* and I’m very pleased that she quickly responded.

Yet, what Avis provides in her *Noti News* is a pleasant break amidst all the busy-ness and seriousness and conflict in today’s world. It grounds readers to a fulfilling hometown daily life filled with plain values and gentle observations. And, it is a throwback to an earlier era for newspapers which regularly filled their pages with such material. In fact, Avis got started in the mid-1960’s under Archie Root, founder of the *West Lane News* when she contributed to a column about Low Pass for a time. “Archie liked to have the daily things that went on,” she reflected.

When I visited Avis for this interview, it felt like stepping back into my childhood, growing up in Florence more

than 30 years ago. Avis and husband Lowell have lived in that house since 1974 (when they moved there from a place at the end of Poodle Creek Road). Lowell was born and lived in Triangle Lake; after he married Avis in 1944, all their children went to school there. Their home in Noti is “cluttered but comfortable”. She is a self-professed packrat, though I found her to be orderly and very resourceful.

Yet Avis mostly raises flowers – lots of them, and she arranges a bouquet every Sunday for the church. Lowell takes care of the janitorial work there and at home. He keeps the fires going, too. “Both of us are real satisfied with what we’ve accomplished and done,” said Avis. Lowell and Avis built a greenhouse 33 years ago that is still in use. There is a carpet of moss for the floor and a sturdy woodstove for heat on extra cold nights. Along with flowers, an orange tree lives there, which has 17 good-sized oranges on it that I saw. Avis has raised pineapples to maturity, too. (It takes two years). She’s a whiz at such things. However, “I don’t like to cook at all,” she confessed, though she does it anyway. “Lowell can eat everything; it’s me that doesn’t like to eat... I love potato chips.”

She doesn’t use a computer; however, Avis can do fine embroidery work, since she got implants in her eyes in 1985. She’s made a lot of quilts – the first one at nine years old. She showed me a recent one, completely hand stitched. She has a lot of yarn, too, and takes it out in the evenings. She takes in what’s on TV and puts out through her hands, she says; she has a mind that sorts things and evaluates. She also has arthritis; that’s why she keeps her hands active. She even makes Christmas cards from photocopies of flowers she’s dried.

“I love home. I’m not a traveler,” Avis shared. She gets up around 4 a.m. and writes in her diary, first thing in the morning. “I can go back and see what I’ve done and haven’t done... It’s so much more mature than what I wrote when younger. More concentrated.” She also keeps scrapbooks of the *West Lane News*, where I saw she had been following the course of *Groundwaters*. They are similar to her diary. In that, she writes down her time of rising, the weather, and fills in whatever comes to mind. Sometimes it’s what mail she gets or about the needs of particular plants. All her writings will be passed on to children who want them. And, she writes letters, including one to her grandson in Kuwait every week.

I hope that Avis and Lowell continue to live simply as they do and share with us in Avis’ offerings to the *West Lane News* (and in *Groundwaters*, too). I need that pleasant break in my harried lifestyle. She’s a real gem. Thank you, Avis Rust!