

Reflections

By Pat Edwards

I recently waved as my 65th birthday passed me by. Oh, I am aware of the years that have piled up, one on top of the other, but it is so amazing to realize that their numbers say to the world that I am truly getting old. I don't feel "old" as I always imagined that "old" would feel. I do feel my body wearing down some. I no longer can pick up those bales of hay out of the field each summer, and the aches and pains remind me that my bones and joints have supported my body for a really long time. Even though I've slowed a bit from my youthful vigor, I still feel vital and alive, despite what the accumulation of years tell me. The realization of age, I think, tends to send each of us back into our past, to reflect upon and evaluate our lives – it's a way of validating our existence. I am no different.

I think back to my childhood. My father was somewhat of a nomad. After living in one place for two years or so, we moved on to another. My brother, sister and I experienced new places and new adventures and lifestyles, but were seldom in one place long enough to cement long-term friendships. I was shy and kept to myself a lot, although I had my share of playmates. My daydreams always seemed to be centered around horses. I loved going to the library and I read every horse story I could find. As a teenager, I loved to write letters to penpals and to the friends I had left behind. Words became fascinating to me and I was told that I wrote well. Like many girls of my era, especially, I tried writing stories but, inevitably, my imagination stalled and I never got very far with them. I've always envied the authors who write fiction, but I never could.

I spent my high school years living my dream of having a horse of my own. Several summers of picking strawberries and beans, hoeing weeds in the same crops and row-bossing allowed me to buy Rocket, my best friend and constant companion in those years. My sister, my friends and I spent long weekends and summer days astride our horses, riding bareback, many times running full out along our familiar trails. I have had horses ever since.

During the one wonderful year that I attended Linfield College, following high school graduation, I loved the writing assignments and I discovered a real fondness for my music and art appreciation classes, as well. World history, math and science were my stumbling blocks. But, I made friends who helped me learn to have fun and explore my self-worth. The funds for my college education ran out after that first year, but I have never regretted the experience of attending college even for that short time.

Following college, I worked in a finance office for several years as a secretary. It was a difficult period in my life. My parents were divorcing, and I was trying to make

my way through a world of dating with little knowledge of what was expected of me. I was still timid and naive and totally unversed in the realities of what "real life" presented. I had a baby out of wedlock and gave her up for adoption. It was a period in my life that I once tried to forget, but despite its harshness, it too helped forge the person who I eventually became.

As I entered my years as a young wife and mother, there was little time to do much with my love for writing. My husband Jim and I bought our first home on 30 acres between Lorane and Crow, Oregon. It was there that we put down our roots and raised our four children. While the kids were preschoolers, I was too busy changing diapers, nursing runny noses and doing the chores on our small farm to take much notice of what was happening around us. I only made one trip to town per week in those days – to do our grocery shopping and to take the kids to lunch. Once the kids were in school, I began looking around at life in my community. I immediately began involving myself in my children's school and their activities. I look back at that time as if I were a flower bud, slowly opening to the world.

When our oldest daughter was old enough, I volunteered to establish a 4-H livestock club in Lorane that she could participate in. A neighbor/rancher was willing to lead the club if I was willing to organize it. I loved doing it so much that I soon volunteered to be the Lorane 4-H coordinator, setting up all types of new clubs for the Lorane area youth. I soon realized that I needed a way to get the word out about what the established clubs were doing and which ones were being formed. I began my first local newsletter called *Pat's People* which I manually typed and mimeographed on the school's old purple-ink machine. I distributed them at the local stores. I was soon shooting off letters to the editor about local issues that concerned me, as well. Once again, I was using my writing skills for not only others, but for myself, as well.

When our oldest offspring were entering high school, the Mitchell family decided to sell their store in Lorane. Jim had managed Mayfair Markets in the area for years and had always wanted his own business; but, the little Mitchell Store was not making enough to sustain a family of six. So, after we purchased it in December 1977, it became my new job. I loved working within its crowded dusty confines with the creaky wooden floor that slanted ever so slightly towards the back where the timbers were beginning to sag. I loved greeting the people who came in to buy a bottle of pop and a candy bar and to stand and chat about their lives. The loggers with their cork boots

were confident that I would not scold them for walking on my very un-pristine floors, leaving bits of mud and dirt in their tracks. Every time I swept, the dust would always settle back onto the merchandise even though we oiled the floors several times a year.

Two friends, Nancy O’Hearn and Marna Hing, helped me run the store during those eight years when it was in my charge. Like so many others, we all became interested in our own family histories when the television series “Roots” awakened the world to genealogy. We began extensive research into our own families and from that work our interest in our community’s history evolved. We knew, from Nancy’s own family history, that Lorane would be celebrating its 100th birthday within a few years. They asked me if I would be willing to write a book on its history – if they would help me research it. It seemed the right time and the right thing to do, and we pursued our goal for over three years. I bought my first computer and taught myself how to use it so that I could record all of our research in an organized manner. We finally published *Sawdust and Cider; A History of Lorane, Oregon and the Siuslaw Valley* in 1987 in conjunction with the Lorane Centennial Celebration.

When Jim took over the running and modernizing of the store full time, I searched for a full time job in town despite the fact that I had not worked at a regular office job for over 20 years. I took my computer experience to a temp agency which immediately put me to work. I was soon offered a permanent position at the Institute of Neuroscience at the University of Oregon where I used my computer skills extensively for 15 years. I gained respect and knowledge in my position there and retired with a confidence that my skills would allow me to succeed wherever life took me.

While working at the University, I began publishing another newsletter called the *Lorane Historian*. It profiled local people and businesses and I wrote about Lorane history that had come to light since 1987. The *Historian* was alive and well for three years until my lack of time and energy brought it to a halt. Since my retirement, I spent a year completely updating and revising *Sawdust and Cider*, incorporating some of the history from the newsletter and profiling the current businesses and people in Lorane. I published the new and much larger edition called *From Sawdust and Cider to Wine* in September 2006.

I’m now becoming more and more involved in the publication of *Groundwaters*, thanks to the confidence that Judy, Sonny, Jen and Pat have shown in me. They have welcomed me to their literary family and I am learning so much from them. I’ve discovered that no matter how much we learn and how long we have lived our lives, there is always room for more experiences and adventures. I have also learned that every experience, good or bad, in our

past goes towards shaping the person we eventually become. Each of us leaves behind our own legacy. I am comfortable with the legacy that I will leave behind for my children, descendants and community because it is a part of who I have become through all of my own experiences.

So, despite the years that say we are old, as long as we have an interest in life and an eagerness to learn, how can any of us truly become “old” in anything but years?