

## **SOLD BY SIDES OF THE ROADS**

Doodling my way through meetings at the newspaper, crafting headlines on deadline, responding patiently to readers with a cause: This -- along with shuttling our son to and fro, and seeking not-made-of-cement places to walk our dogs -- was my California life. I loved it, except for the sensation of living life like a kid at the fair, rushing through one midway ride just to jump on another, then another; at the end of the day remembering little about any particular one. That was before my world began to shift north.

I'd been standing at the stove, looking at the worn sun dial in the yard and the 18 years worth of purple, pink and red roses, and the gold and violet day lilies we'd planted. My husband, Jim, had loped up the back stairs, tossed his cap - gone tan with vineyard dust -- on the table and fired off the question, "How would you like to move to Oregon?" I kept stirring the spaghetti sauce on the back burner as I'd asked, "Why?" Before he could answer, I'd put down the spoon, turned and asked, "Where in Oregon?"

"The Willamette Valley," Jim had said, not hiding his excitement. "It's a little farm town called Yamhill. The place we'd live has amazing views. There's so much room for the dogs -- meadows, even a pond." I, rather indignantly, had said, "You already know where we'd live?" Still, he'd captured my attention by conjuring the vision of dogs splashing into water within walking distance of our back door.

With that, Jim had pulled from his briefcase the packet of photos his boss had spread out before him earlier that day when he'd proposed the idea of Jim going north to develop vineyards in Oregon and Washington. The place in the photos appeared to be an emerald paradise. The rooms in the house even loomed large, compared to the cracker-box size rooms of our in-town Victorian. I wasn't completely sold that first night. There were, after-all, four generations of my family where we lived in the Wine Country.

Soon after, we made a visit to Yamhill. Being there felt like coming home -- to the place of my childhood. What I remember most from that trip are the roadsides: Country roads awash in blurred shades of green -- lime, hunter, celadon and chartreuse -- as in an Impressionist painting. Roads lined with shooting-everywhere berry vines holding hands with wild roses, their arm-like limbs stretching out to tap utility poles on the shoulder. There was even a llama loose on one of the curves. What I saw evoked

memories of roads where my school bus had bumped along, and where I'd ridden bareback -- before dusty orchards gave way to tidy subdivisions. As our plane returned to California, I had a notebook in hand and was listing all that needed to be done to forge our personal trail to Oregon.

Jim moved first. Our son, Adam, and I followed when school let out for summer; and after I'd said farewell to newspaper colleagues I'd worked with for near 20 years. That was harder than saying good bye to friends and family: I knew even though we'd exchanged mailing addresses and e-mails, I likely wouldn't see most of their faces again. Thus began what I'd taken to calling Our Great Midlife Adventure when friends said, "You guys are so brave, packing up your lives and moving out of state!"

At first, I tried to make our Oregon home mimic the one in California. I painted walls the same deep burgundy, burnished orange and cobalt blue colors, hung pictures in the same groupings, and shelved our books in the same order. Becoming a true Oregonian began the day I was in the hardware store with a collection of paint chips in my hand.

Repeatedly, my eye was drawn to two particular shades of green. With a start, I realized these were the same shades of green prevalent on our first drive along Yamhill County's rural roads. French Olive Green and Spring Green they were called. I left the store with gallons of each. When I began brushing the new colors onto the remaining walls, the strange new house began to feel like home

That's not to say it wasn't lonely. Once I'd set up house at our Yamhill address, I looked around and realized I knew no one. While planting cosmos and corn one evening, I confessed to my husband how very alone I felt. Looking out at the rows of vines silhouetted against the sun, setting in a rhubarb-colored sky, he'd said simply, "You need to get a dog." (We'd come to Oregon dogless, having lost two golden retrievers to cancer not long before our move.) So I did.

That's all it took: a chocolate Labrador retriever named Kobe. He was ever-so-sweet but needed better manners. I inquired around about an obedience class. On the afternoon the instructor, Sandy, and I spoke, I mentioned my son had just registered to attend the local high school. Wouldn't you know: She also ran a volunteer program there. I was soon signed up for dog and teen training! My new world suddenly seemed smaller and brighter. Sandy, as it turned out, was to become my best Oregon friend.

Through my new friend, I met several volunteer mentors at the high school and learned I had something in common with nearly all of them: dogs, horses, books or teen-age sons. I met folks at neighboring ranches the day Kobe sent a stray cat up an oak tree, and I went searching for its owner.

The following spring, I'd been thinking about how everything was working out so well and how much I was liking Oregon when the accident happened. I slipped in Kobe's kennel, dislocated and broke my ankle in three places. Facing surgeries and months of no walking and no driving, I worried about how to get through it without my family support system nearby and Jim often gone to Washington.

I should have known better: I lived in Oregon. Dinners appeared in our kitchen the first nights I was home from the hospital, spontaneous gifts from folks down the road and up the hill. Sandy tended to Kobe – and my first-ever chicks -- and kept my spirits up. Another new friend did grocery shopping and drove me to doctor visits. All this from people I'd known by name for a matter of months, not years. Prior to moving, I'd been warned Oregon people didn't like Californians one iota. "Pshaw," I say to that now.

This, our third summer in Yamhill, the ripples that started with Kobe have turned into waves. Through Sandy, we've met other Yamhillians. In fact, we've become part of the group of regulars who meet Friday nights at the local pizza-pub. Sometimes when we gather, I feel like I'm in the bar from the "Cheers" TV show. Then I listen to the conversation:

"We lost three chickens to a hawk." "I planted iris around the roses, and that's keeping the deer away." "It got so hot, we had to make the pigs' wallow bigger so they could stay cool." "I got locked in the chicken coop and had to use my cell phone to get someone to let me out." "When that big wind came up, all the horses went and stood in the middle of the pasture."

It's then I realize the lives of these people – our friends – are far more interesting than anything on television. Now it's my life, too. While I wasn't looking, Oregon became my home.

The proof? The night Adam graduated, we asked him what his best high school memory was. His answer: "Moving to Yamhill." Pass a slice of pizza, please, and don't forget a doggie bag for Kobe.

