

Who values the Land”?

Each of us has a different perspective about what it means to live in the Evergreen area. A few will say, “We were born here we’re Natives.” Others will reply, “Well, we feel like natives too, we’ve been here for 10 years or 25 years” and then hoping not to hear any animosity, many will confess Ummm... we moved here from California last year.

Newcomers from other areas have created a different value system here. Ranch land is now carved up into plots that are a stone’s throw from each other’s bathroom windows. Houses are commonly built with a million dollar plus price tag to cover the 1-5 cost ratio of the land. In the midst of this rampant development, some of the “natives”, the pioneers that built the area, the ranchers that hauled sugar beets to Golden, raised turkeys and fox for the meat and fur markets, and mined pegmatite for Coors Ceramics during prohibition still maintain the old values of harmony with nature and continue to honor the land.

One of well-known pioneers is Norman Ralston, who died this year. His uncle was Lewis Ralston was the first to find gold in Clear Creek. His family owned both sides of I-70 and in the 1930’s his father built one of the first professional ski jumps in Colorado where the Genesee, Chimney Creek, condominiums now dot the hillside. : He lived simply in a cabin in Cold Springs Gulch built when the highway took the family lands.

He often told the story of how it took him a month to haul all the old ranching equipment over to his house. He points with pride to the hay baler where the horse walks around the baler to provide the mechanism to bale the hay and the potato picker, (Evergreen was once a large potato growing area), with its parts now a rusty hue. His property contains old tractors with iron wheels, cars and trucks from the 30’s; even the treadle sewing machine that belonged to his mother.

“Summerhaven” a well built cabin, graced with elk horns and old equipment was his home since that time. He lived simply; his wealth was in the land he lovingly cared for. In the spring when his cattle are produced new calves, he could be seen out in the field digging the Russian thistle out by hand. He didn’t use a baler; he piled the hay in shocks and threw it to the top of the hay wagon to take to his shed on Kerr Gulch or to pile in the old way in the field so the rain can drain off easily. Until a few years ago he preferred to get his water from the stream and would cut holes in the ice and drag it up to the house in five gallon buckets. Now there is a pump in the basement.

If you were fortunate enough to visit Norm, he would show you his Indian arrowhead collection, gathered from the time he was a young boy. Laid in two wooden boxes on a bed of cotton, he would proudly point out the beautiful Folsom point, the treasure of the collection. Unfortunately, the collection was stolen from his cabin but not his trust in people. Each year he searched his land for the perfect tree for the Rockland Community church that he attended. When asked his opinion on all the new growth in Evergreen, he would reply, “Well everyone has to have a place to live.”

Norm loved to tell stories. Once he talked about the man who brought an old map that detailed where gold might be buried on Norm's land, the product of a stagecoach robbery when the old stage road cut through his land. Norm gave him the go ahead to look all he wanted but he said he never if it was found because the man never offered a cut of the money. He was the honored guest at Tri-Gulch parties where he easily recounted the history of the area to newcomers and if asked will play his beautiful German accordion to sing the old songs, like "Take me Back to Colorado, Slap her Down again Pa" and beautiful hymns such as the "Old Rugged Cross" and Amazing Grace.

As he got older, many people approached him about leaving his land to a conservation trust so the area could be maintained as a wildlife preserve, a buffer between the Ridge and Genesee. He recalled the story of a certain man who lived down the road and wanted to buy his land. When Norm politely refused, he announced he would take it all when he died. Norm told us that he didn't live here anymore; he went bankrupt and left the country. Norm didn't worry much about the future. For him it was enough to cut wood for the winter to keep the woodstove going, to carefully watch the trees and cut them to keep the beetle out and to enjoy his cattle and the new calves each spring.

People who live in the area now wonder "What will happen to the land now that Norm has died?" Will the trees fall to the developer; will the old mining holes be sealed up to make room for new asphalt? But no matter what will happen, everyone feels fortunate for the lessons that Norm has taught. Sometimes more than money is important, the ethics and values of who you are on the land is what counts.

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