

SOME PLACES ARE STILL

By Donald Harding

There's no place much closer to nowhere than this place. Stranded out in the middle of somewhere, is this spot on the map that some folks would consider next to nothing. But to me the dusty little town on the edge of the mountains is almost everything. My roots are there.

Half buried in a field of weeds out behind the garage where Granddad spent so much of his life tinkering with this or that, the once proud old girl looked and probably felt abandoned. The many miles, which passed beneath her tires, had done a fine job of wearing her out. The relentless process of aging continued as the weeds tickled her rotting skin.

After Granddad left us, whenever we came back to visit Grandma, I would wonder out to that forgotten place to remember. I would absorb the beauty of the aging process: the pattern of cracks in the windshield, the texture and color of the rust eating holes in her metal skirt and the memory of sitting next to him in that cab, easily persuaded me to revisit the past. The worn and cracked tires could no longer contain the breath needed to hold her up. Every time my thoughts were pushed back to that memorable day.

Leaning back against the house as we sat on Grandma's deck in the fading sunlight, our gaze took in objects in the distance—ranch house here and there, trees, and grazing cattle—all slowly became silhouettes. The pine tree-covered mountains to the north were turning from dark blue to pitch black.

A couple hundred yards in front of us a blacktop highway crept up onto an overpass that allowed you to get to the other side of the Burlington-Northern railroad tracks and the trickle of water folks call a river. Mesmerized by the sights, sounds, and laid-back feeling of the area, we watched a dilapidated, makeshift vehicle sputter across the overpass. Producing more noise than speed, it pucker-chucked along carrying some sort of an appliance in her hip pocket. "There's Granddad..." I commented, "...people out here don't seem at all concerned about owning all brand-new things; cars, clothes and all that stuff," I thought out loud. "They haven't fallen for the idea that having new and more is what it takes to make one content."

"Yeah, they really know how to get the best use out of everything," son, David said, "even time. Everything is so laid-back out here; no one seems to worry about anything. Everything gets done, and if it doesn't get done exactly on time, life goes on." Wanderlust in his voice, he continued, "Such an attractive way to live."

Soon we heard the noisy hit-and-miss sound of Granddad's old makeshift pick-up truck pull up in front of the house. As if he knew where we were, he made his through the house to the back porch. We could hear him praising his long-time companion, the worn out truck he'd used for years to haul whatever needed hauling. "Not sure how many more trips she's worth," he mumbled under his breath as he greeted us. She's just about all worn out and right now I'm feel'en like I'm not much behind her..."

Dad spent his life helping others and that help usually involved his pickup truck. I thought to myself, "If his truck gives up the ghost, what'll he do...?" Later that evening when the night took over and Granddad was off to bed, resting his weary bones, David said to me, "Dad, what'll Granddad do if his truck gives out on him? You know how much he depends on that old pile of junk..."

Christmas was only a couple pages back on the calendar and even though a new truck would be a great gift for Granddad, we knew it was out of the question. "Let's look around for a used one," I suggested. "I'll bet the family would help with the cost... Lets go truck shopping when we get home!"

MY TURN

The first truck for sale in the local paper turned out to be just the ticket. Only a few years old, she'd been well taken care of; not too many miles had passed beneath her tires. The family was eager in supporting the idea of a new truck for Dad. Grandma was in on the surprise, and she secretly told friends about what was to take place Christmas Eve. We would drive the truck back when we made the trip to spend the holidays and present it to Dad. Arrangements were made to have all his friends gather in the shadows as we brought him out to see what we'd done.

David suggested we wrap the truck with ribbon; that idea evolved into using Christmas lights instead. So, before leaving the land of straight north to south and east to west roads, along with our luggage and gifts to be placed under Mom's tree, we packed a string of several hundred large Christmas lights.

All went better than planned. Christmas Eve afternoon, Mom sent Dad to the grocery store with a list about a half hour long and we went to the hiding place and wrapped the truck with the lights. A former high school classmate agreed to drive the truck over to the folk's house and park it out of sight by Dad's garage while we were at the Christmas Eve church service. We came home, began preparing for the traditional family Christmas Eve candlelight meal. I snuck outside and drove the pickup to the driveway. The surprise party was gathering in the shadows. All was set.

Back in the house, dinner was ready. Mom left the soup on the stove and called for our attention. "I'm hungry, Mom," Dad said, "what now!" "Well, there's something you all need to see. Come out on the front porch and help me figure this out. Something's going on outside..."

The eight of us plus Granddad gathered at the door. I went ahead and quickly plugged in the extension cord. The thirty or so invited guest were gathered behind the pickup now lit up like a Christmas tree. Dad was pushed outside into the crisp winter night. As soon as he exited, a shout went up from those around his new truck. "Merry Christmas, Camden... Merry Christmas." He was stunned. "Go check her out, Granddad," David said. "Go check her out..."

You'd have thought he was a kid opening up the gift, which had been on top of his list to Santa. He quizzed, "Who's responsible for this... where did this come from... is it really for me? Mine... really!?"

The truck became almost a next-of-kin to Dad after he put the old makeshift pickup to rest. Many years were left in both Dad and the truck and they were used well. Lots of folks in that slow little dusty town were blessed by them both.

There's no place closer to nowhere than that little town where I grew up, but it's everything to me. One of my fondest memories is the sight of a used pickup truck, decorated with Christmas lights and the look on my dad's face that crisp Christmas Eve, many years ago.

A LOOK BACK, A GLANCE FORWARD

Dr. ALAN LAIRD
CMO Orange City Area Health System

I was privileged to join the Orange City Area Health System (OCAHS) medical staff over 30 years ago. As I get ready to exit from this excellent organization, I want to take a brief look backward. I believe the history of OCAHS can cause us to be confident about the future of healthcare for the Orange City area. While OCAHS does not provide all the medical care in our area, I do believe its history represents the progress for all providers.

When I joined OCAHS, our hospital did not have a CT scanner; the closest was Sioux City. An MRI meant a trip to the only scanner in the state at Iowa City. We could do basic laboratory work. However, many things were sent out and returned in a day or maybe a week. It took us two to three days to know if you had heart injury when your electrocardiogram did not show changes. Today we have access to onsite CT and MRI 24 hours a day. We can evaluate for heart injury in a matter of minutes to hours and most of the laboratory we need is done at OCAHS and reported in minutes to hours. The supporting tools for our practitioners has grown immensely.

When I started we had two surgeons that covered three or more hospitals, anesthesiologists that also covered several hospitals, a radiologist that covered multiple hospitals (and no means to look at X-rays unless he was present at your facility) and very few specialists came to Orange City. Today we have a dedicated group of surgeons, a full time radiologist, a dedicated group of anesthesiologists lead by an anesthesiologist, and vast array of specialists offering care at OCAHS.

Our family practice group has grown in terms of the number of providers, their scope of practice and even services targeted to athletes, diabetes, joint problems, skin problems and infertility among others.

Of course, this is not just limited to physicians and medical tests. We have grown in physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, clinical pharmacists, mental health providers, nursing skills and services both in the hospital (inpatient) and outside the hospital (outpatient), and more ambulance teams.

That is nothing to say of the new hospital, the new clinics, new retirement community and nursing home along with all the supporting service that make those run smoothly. I am sure I have missed some positions and items; forgive me, but space is limited.

Indeed there has been significant growth. Why is that important? I believe it indicates a higher quality of care, less travel for care and more options in care for the Orange City area. All well and good. But, as I am about to exit, things feel very different. Nobody would be surprised to hear that the last two years have been unusual in the medical profession. Coming out of those years have left us with seismic changes. These changes include personnel, finances, insurance changes, supply issues, ability to transfer patients needing a higher level of care, and availability of

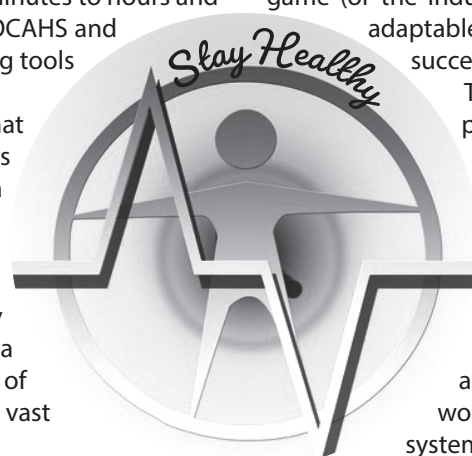
specialists to travel to Orange City. We have faced all of these before, but this time it seems to be all at once. Truly, the seas look much rougher for medical care in the near future than I have ever seen. Perhaps many of you are feeling the same way in your profession or line of work. I know these difficulties aren't just in medical practice. So why do I have trust in OCAHS? I believe there are three reasons (and probably more) to have confidence that you can and will receive the care you and I will need at OCAHS.

The first reason is for all the growth mentioned above. We ask about a player's statistics in their respective sport to get an idea about their future performance. It is not a guarantee, but it can give us a good idea. Given OCAHS' record, I have a lot of confidence in how they will do in future, even if the rules of the game (or the industry) change. They have proven themselves adaptable as well as innovative. That is a recipe for success.

The second reason is the people I have had the privilege to work alongside. I have been given the opportunity to work with, or see at work, almost every area of OCAHS. From those who clean our environment and fix our buildings, to those who help us with billing and budgeting. From those who provide care (doctors, nurses, CNAs, therapists and many, many others) to those who greet you and register your information. From those who work in leadership to those who fix the computer systems and programs. From those who respond to emergencies outside the hospital to the people who help you get back home. All these people seem to be here for more than a paycheck. They really do care. I have seen it. They go above and beyond. Do we always get it perfect? Nope. But we do most of the time.

The third is the leadership team at OCAHS. From those we often think of as leading (CEO, directors, etc.) to those who do so behind the scenes, I have watched them in action. They have solved difficult situations, made finances stretch when necessary, and provided reasonable and thoughtful leadership when there was no blueprint for success.

OCAHS is well positioned for the stormy sea ahead. It won't be easy, and there will be changes and adjustments. But, there is no question from what I have seen, that OCAHS is well prepared. So while I will miss the people and seeing their talented performance, I know there will be excellent healthcare in Orange City for myself, my loved ones and those who choose OCAHS for their healthcare. I am so grateful to people of Orange City, Hospers, Alton, Granville, Paullina and the surrounding area who have placed their trust in OCAHS over the years. Without your trust and support, we would not be here today; a position that sets us up for the next 30 years of healthcare in the area (and most likely beyond). We are blessed.



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LIBRARY NEWS



Alton Library

The light of the Christmas star to you, The warmth of home and hearth to you, The cheer and goodwill of friends to you, The joy of a thousand angels to you, The love of the Son, And God's peace to you. ~ Irish Christmas Blessing
Merry Christmas from the staff of the Alton Public Library!

Upcoming Hours:
Dec. 23: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Dec. 24-26: Closed

Orange City Library

Dear Readers,

I did some research on Christmas past in the Sioux County Newspaper Archives. Although times have changed, much remains the same. We still enjoy spending time with family and friends, as many people were mentioned in the papers as coming to visit and spend their Christmas vacations here. The advertisements were for walking dolls at \$4.98, Christmas wreaths for \$0.75, teddy bears for \$0.69 and tea sets for \$0.25. My favorite ad was Give a Book for Christmas with a list of suggestions. The joy of reading is a gift given year-round. Check out a book or an e-book from your library today!

Merry Christmas to all of you! From all of us at the Orange City Public Library.

Orange City Public Library

Hours:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, 9:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Wednesday and Friday 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

The library will be closed December 24-26.

Please check the library's social media and website for upcoming education and literacy programs.

Maurice Book Bank

Hours

9-11:30 a.m. weekdays, Saturday

3:30-6:30 p.m. weekdays

Christmas is a time of year when we reflect on how a little baby came to change the course of history for all mankind and eternity. We strive to comprehend the marvel of it all. Families celebrate traditions, presents, and quality time. Children are curious and excited. This year, many families might not be able to come together due to COVID. Perhaps, this is a time that we will be able to realize just how much we have taken for granted in years past.

At The Book Bank, we hope to be a part of a new tradition with your families. We pray that you will come and visit The Book Bank when and if your grandchildren and children come to visit. We hope that when you enter our facility you will sense the wonder of Christmas not just in our decorations, but in the hearts of our volunteers. May we always hold true to the real meaning of Christmas not just during this time, but all year through.

Women's Coffee Hour: Wednesdays from 9-10:00 a.m.

Books can be dropped off in the book return on the outside of the building all hours. Our return box is the former night deposit box for the former bank. How neat that we can use it as our book drop box!

Monthly Reading Programs: Be sure to stop by and pick up a December/January reading calendar for your children! Your child will star each day they read or were read to for 15 minutes. If they have 15 starred days, they can enter for a chance to win some sweet prizes.

Snow days pile up for local schools

By SARAH WEBER
Co-Editor

ORANGE CITY— The week of December 12-16 gave local school children a taste of winter break a week ahead of schedule. Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday school was called off due to treacherous winter driving conditions, making a total of five snow days so far for the 2022-23 school year. The snow accumulation total this winter are between four to eight inches of snow across Sioux County, with freezing rain and ice mixed in. Districts are responding to the missing school days in a variety of ways. Jason Alons, principal at Orange City Christian School, said, "We are still discussing how to make up academic time." He shares that, "Thankfully we have enough hours built in to fulfill the minimum requirements from the state which gives us flexibility in how to make up for the missing academic time."

MOC-Floyd Valley Superintendent Russ Adams shares the plan for the district. "Typically we make up full missed days but not partial days. The state requires districts to attend for a minimum of 1,080 hours, and our calendar is designated with 1,121 hours, so we have room to adjust. If we have several more snow days, we may consider adjusting our scheduled professional development time, but we prefer not to do this."

For MOC-FV the first snow day, Nov. 29, will be made up May 24. The second, Dec. 9, will be made up May 25. The third, Dec. 13, will be made up Feb. 20. The fourth, Dec. 15 will be made up May 26, and the fifth, Dec. 16 will be made up April 10.