

# FROM THE Editor's Desk

BY SARAH NIGBOR



## The asphalt ribbon

As I sit next to my grandma's hospice bed this Sunday evening, I turn to what comforts me: Writing. We've had a hard couple of days in our family as our beloved matriarch was admitted to hospice on Tuesday, April 5. A fighter until the end, this 96-year-old feisty Norwegian has to be sedated to keep her calm. I believe she hears us, but is holding on so tightly to the thin thread of life. We've assured her it's okay to take Grandpa's hand, to let him take her dancing toward the stars, but so far, she's not taken him up on his offer. We're convinced she's just too worried about leaving us behind.

It's fitting for her to be at Spring Valley as her childhood farm is just over the hill on County Road 1. As we leave the care center at night and head toward River Falls, we can see the lamplight glowing from the windows of the old farmhouse she once called home with her parents and brother. When she could still speak, she even told us that she had "come home."

I spend a lot of my life on Highway 29 and as I traveled the familiar route, I realized that Highway 29 is like a ribbon rippling through Grandma's life, with significant places along the way strung like beads on a necklace. Who knew a stretch of cracked asphalt could "see" so much?

She and my grandpa moved to rural River Falls, just off Highway 29, when they retired from dairy farming near Nugget Lake. The route they took from Nugget Lake to their new home took them past Gilman Lutheran Church, where they united in marriage on May 27, 1947. Grandma wore a beautiful ivory gown and held the biggest bouquet of deep red roses I've ever seen. She recalled how it snowed that day (yes, snowed) and was pretty cold. I guess Spring was confused in 1947 as well. It was quite something too, for a Norwegian to be marrying a Swede. Her parents weren't quite on board with that one at first, but love won.

As they went west on Highway 29, they passed the intersection where Grandma's grandpa had once had his buttermaking shop (near Highway 29 and County Road BB).

Further down the line, just south of the Highway 63/29 intersection at the former Red Barn, Grandma was born in a little house (no longer standing) on a dirt road near Martell. If you head north on Highway 63, just before you turn west again on 29, she and her family moved to a little farm there (now long gone, but replaced by a beautiful house) when she was small. They eventually moved to County Road 1, and she graduated from high school in Spring Valley.

Further west over the Rush River bridge stands the Kay School where Grandma and her brother attended grade school for the first time. They didn't speak English when they first entered Kay School, since they spoke their native Norwegian at home. Grandma recalled how they would ski to school in winter (without poles) and what it felt like to fly over the snow, how good the woodstove felt on wet, woolen mittens, and how scared she was to speak in front of the other students. Never a star pupil, she would find her niche later by becoming an excellent housekeeper, baker, cook and farm wife.

As hard as it is for me to let go of her, every time I drive Highway 29 from River Falls to my home east of Spring Valley, I will be reminded of her and her stories, her love and her legacy. Past Saddle Club Road, that leads to where I grew up with her and Grandpa; past Kay School, where a scared little Norwegian girl clung tightly to her brother's hand, her big green eyes taking it all in; past the Highway 63/29 corner, picturing a little farmhouse and barn, and a little girl swinging a milk bucket as she runs to the house; past the dirt road leading to her birthplace and our history; past the historic brick church, envisioning her and my grandpa stepping down the stairs, beaming as congratulations drifted in the wind; past County Road 1, where the lamplight is burning in her old bedroom window, where we spent Thanksgiving with her brother and his wife every year; past the care center, where we are spending our final hours with her and reminiscing.

I love you, Grandma.

# WOODWORKING Again

BY DAVE WOOD



## When I finally 'arrived'

Literary lore is full of stories about how poverty-stricken free-lance writers are on London's Grub Street and New York's Tin Pan Alley. One of my favorites comes from an acquaintance, Calvin Trillin, a New Yorker staffer who several years ago began writing a regular freelance piece for The Nation Magazine, not known for its generosity to freelancers. When his charming wife asked him how much he was being paid, Trillin replied, "\$25." "My God, that's just not enough," she shot back. "It was then," recalled Trillin, "that I vowed I would somehow achieve an increase in the pitiful rate." What did he do? He wrote limericks, the first about the possibility of German reunification. This is it:

There is a fate  
That might befall us,  
Deutschland, Deutschland  
Über Alles.

"How much now?" asked spouse.

"Twenty-five."  
"Not enough."

"My dear," replied Trillin. "Don't you realize that amounts to SIX DOLLARS AND TWENTY-FIVE CENTS per line!? That's more than John Milton got for Paradise Lost."

It's sad but true that freelancers are in most cases a starving lot. I taught a course in freelance writing at Augsburg and lost half my students when I mentioned that a recent survey found that the top thousand writers surveyed made an average of \$500 per year, and that's the average where some of the bigshots earned \$50,000.

It was a day like any other day when I broke the barrier. Columnist Robert T. Smith and I entered Chessen's Deli in the Wheat Exchange near the Star Tribune. We were greeted by the amiable owner Ronnie Chessen. "What'll it be fellas?" I reported Bob's answer to my editor at Grit, where I was freelancing a weekly column.

Not long after, I received a call from a Reader's Digest agent responsible for items like "Humor in these United States." He wanted to know if the scenario had actually happened, and if it did, could he publish it the Reader's Digest. You bet he could, said I. Months later I ran into Chessen, and he told me Reader's Digest had called and wondered if the scenario had actually happened. Ron also told me the Digest wanted the name of another customer who was also there. That turned out to be a Star Tribune printer. And when the scenario was published in Reader's Digest, I got a call from my father, an avid Digest fan (he liked things short and sweet.), who told me I had finally "arrived."

And then I received a check for \$500. I'd heard that the Digest was having financial trouble and now I knew why. That didn't stop me from cashing the check. And from saving the only copy I have ever read of the Reader's Digest. Here's what got me the biggest check I ever got for a freelance article:

### AT YOUR SERVICE

When a group of us entered a delicatessen that I frequent in Minneapolis, the owner approached to take our order. A friend of mine, in a playful mood, ordered the following:

"Ron, I want 140 knockwursts on pumpernickel buns, 100 with the works and the rest with just hot mustard. Then give me 27 pints of coleslaw, about 40 of baked beans. And could you toss in about six dozen kosher dills and 17 pieces of cheesecake and hold the cherries on seven of them?"

Ron looked at my friend cupped his hand to his mouth turned toward the kitchen and hollered: "Number 3!"

Page 21, Reader's Digest, September 1992

That's ten lines at \$50 per line. Way better than John Milton.

# LETTERS to the Editor

## National Volunteer Week

To the editor,

National Volunteer Week is April 17-23. As the volunteer coordinator for the School District of River Falls, I would like to take the opportunity to recognize the community of River Falls and its long tradition of supporting our students and schools through volunteering. Throughout the years, volunteers have made a big difference in the lives of our students and teachers, providing support and assistance in many ways.

During these past two years, we have had

limited volunteer opportunities in our schools, and are all looking forward to welcoming volunteers back in greater numbers for the 2022-23 school year. This letter serves to thank ALL of the volunteers in our schools, past, present, and future. Your support and commitment have been felt by our staff and students, and we thank you. Gratefully,

Lesley Schradle  
Volunteer Coordinator  
School District of River Falls

By Rep. Warren Petryk  
Representing Wisconsin  
State Assembly District 93



State Rep. Warren Petryk

Every two years, I send out a legislative survey to understand what the constituents of the 93rd Assembly District would like to be prioritized down in Madison as well as what they would like to become law. When the results came back mid-2021, over 71% of respondents said they did not want the state to increase taxes, and a majority of them listed cutting taxes as one of their top priorities for this session.

### \$22 billion

This is the total amount of tax relief that Wisconsin taxpayers have received since 2011, according to the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau. This number includes actions I voted for in the Assembly, such as eliminating taxes on health savings accounts, reducing taxes on our manufacturing and agriculture sectors to spur investment, ending taxes for people with disabilities to purchase equipment, helping veterans, working to continue to reduce state income taxes, reducing property taxes, and completely eliminating state taxes on one's property tax bill.

Throughout my time in office, I have made it one of my top priorities to reduce the tax burden for Wisconsinites. In fact, over the past ten years in office, I have supported efforts to cut income taxes which has led to the average family paying 30% less in income taxes today as compared to 2011. In fact, in the last budget, the Legislature rejected the Gov. Evers' legislation calling for billions in new taxes and spending. Instead, we crafted a budget that included \$650 million in property tax relief as well as \$2 billion in income tax relief. This provided Wisconsinites an overall tax cut that totals over \$3.4 billion - meaning that the typical Wisconsin family can expect to see roughly \$1,200 in income and property tax relief over the next two years.

Putting money back in the pockets of Wisconsinites is an incredibly important aspect of our state's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and has always been one of my top legislative priorities. While families and communities as a

Cutting taxes also helps stimulate investment in our state and in turn, helps grow our economy. This has resulted in our state having a stable balance going into the next budget while we continue to make deposits into the rainy-day fund. This balance will be needed as we continue to see fiscal uncertainty at the federal level. In addition, the state will likely need to address the end of all the one-time federal stimulus funds.

Going forward, please do not hesitate to reach out with any other thoughts, questions, or concerns. You can also stay up-to-date about what is going on in Madison by signing up for my E-Update at [www.Rep-WarrenPetryk.com](http://www.Rep-WarrenPetryk.com)

# Civil conversations: The key for change

It's always been my top priority to be accessible to the people I was elected to serve. In my four years serving in the State Assembly in the 2000's, I scheduled town hall listening sessions as often as I could. My office arranged listening sessions at town halls, libraries and other public spaces during times that were open in my schedule, which often meant during the work day.

Occasionally a constituent would come in and share his or her thoughts, but it was quiet for the most part. More often I would sit alone inside a building and out of sight; it made me wonder if there was a better way to connect with the people I was elected to serve. I brainstormed for a while and realized curbside listening sessions worked better for everyone on the move. (This was way before curbside became a thing during the pandemic).

I got to work on the plan. I still had my old Dodge pickup that I used for my small business. All I needed was a sign for my neighbors to know that I was there, ready to listen. And that's just how my Stop & Talks got started.

The 2011 redistricting process radically changed the makeup of the district. Having lost the Assembly seat and faced with a nearly all-new gerrymandered district I had one more reason to rethink how I interacted with folks and made myself available to my community.

Over the years, I was still unable to break through the heavily gerrymandered district



State Sen. Jeff Smith

and be re-elected to the Assembly, but my Stop & Talks were well received and appreciated by all those who stopped by. My only regret when I first started this method of connecting with voters was that I hadn't had the opportunity to conduct these mobile office hours when I was an elected representative.

Now, as the elected State Senator representing the 31st Senate District covering all or most of Eau Claire, Dunn, Pepin, Pierce, Buffalo, Trempealeau and Jackson counties, it has been my pleasure to park my pickup at busy locations where constituents can easily find me, prop up my sign and have conversations with my constituents. In our northern climate, it's obviously a seasonal activity and the pandemic caused me to shut it down for too long but I'm excited to be back at it again.

I've been part of some incredible conversations over the years. It's a privilege to have people feel they can open up to me on the side of the

road. There have been tears and hugs and occasionally some tough conversations.

What the "Stop and Talk" has taught me is that we're not naturally good listeners. I'm constantly reminding myself to begin the conversation by listening and wait for the moment when the person talking might expect a response. Having these conversations, I think, really helps the new friends I make, as well as myself. Everyone who's stopped has contributed to my own personal growth and has made me a better public servant.

It's important for me to be approachable and that's why my Stop & Talks work. I think it's made some people, who might otherwise be uncomfortable in a more formal setting, willing to approach their state senator with their thoughts.

We are more alike than we appear to be—Wisconsinites want much of the same things. Economic and physical security, educational opportunity for our children, clean drinking water, affordable housing, living wages, accessible and affordable healthcare, and a life that allows time to enjoy what this beautiful state has to offer.

Once we actually have respectful conversations like I have on the side of the road, we can make progress toward understanding each other. This opens the door for the prospect that we can work together and preserve the freedoms that our great democratic republic was created to offer.

# Construction season is starting in WI

PAID CONTENT

## The Pierce Perspective

(Note: These commentaries are always written by Pierce County residents)

Education is an essential ingredient for a society to function effectively and improve itself over time. Wisconsin has had a rich history of efforts to provide that opportunity to its citizens at all levels. Our public schools, vocational/technical schools, extensive higher education system, and Cooperative Extension, served our citizens very effectively at all levels for many years. There was a time in the 1950s and 60s when many of us could get a four-year college degree and beyond fully paid for by having a summer job and maybe a part-time job during the school year because the state funded about 75 percent of the cost. The state now funds a much lower level of the cost of higher education.

In 2010 Governor Scott Walker and his Republican colleagues saw a need to reign in this progressive trend in the education of our society in the name of fiscal conservatism. Act 10 severely cut school funding, denigrated teachers to the point of making them enemies of society, handcuffed school boards and school districts from adequately funding schools, and discouraged many of our young people from pursuing careers in education.

Since 2010, our Republican-controlled state government has further reduced or barely maintained educational funding at all levels via the state budget allocations, restrictions on the funds local school districts can raise, and limiting the tuition our higher education system charges. Then in 2020-21 when the Federal government provided funds to help alleviate some of the deficiencies in schools caused mainly by COVID-19 our Republican-controlled Legislature was dead set against those funds - until they were finally shamed into accepting them. They took the federal money, reduced or maintained the sub-standard state funding, and then back-filled with the Federal dollars. Now a couple of our western Wisconsin state Republican legislators and others of their ilk have the gall to brag about how they are supporting education in Wisconsin by providing greatly increased funding - but with Federal, not state dollars. After subtracting and holding back state funding for over a decade there isn't much to brag about.

Good citizenship is made possible by having a basic understanding of economics, sociology, political science, health care, environmental sustainability, food production; and, nowadays some awareness in the use of computers, iPhones, and digital communications. Truly educated citizens are better able to make decisions and come to agreement about which policies and priorities are of most benefit to our society. We also need to be grounded in the basic principles of truth, honesty, and kindness to each other. We need to accept responsibility for our own actions and the policies we support in an increasingly complex society. Finally, we need an ability to think for ourselves and separate the wheat from the chaff and fake news that is so very plentiful these days.

Signed,  
The Pierce County Democrats