



Wise Words from Forrest Gump's Mama #33

with Bob Quinn

Was it Forrest Gump's mother who used to say that during the dreary winter doldrums you have to work hard to use your brain. Otherwise it can clog up and might not be there when you need it...

If so, she might just as well have been talking about a ground water source well. Wintertime is usually a time of year when water demand drops to a level that is only what's needed for normal domestic consumption. Such reduced demand is likely to only drop the static water level by just a few feet. This can cause the water in your well to stagnate—an ideal condition to encourage the growth of iron. Over a period of time this buildup of iron can clog the walls of the well and may eventually seal your well off. The best advice is to run your well pump hard at least twice during the winter season. This practice will help flush out the iron and is good preventive care for your investment. Personally, I think Forrest Gump's mom was a lot smarter than some of the politicians in Washington, but that's a whole other story...

Bob Quinn is a member of the Oregon Ground Water Association and owner of Quinn's Well Drilling and Pump Service at 6811 Williams Hwy., Grants Pass. As part of a tradition of information and service that began more than 50 years ago, these columns are provided by the firm to help take the mystery out of well drilling and ground water. If you have a question about your well or one you are planning, please call Bob or his helpful staff for advice, estimates, or helpful information at no obligation or cost.

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TRENDS AND OBSERVATIONS

Floating freezers

BY RAUNO PERTTU

In my first geology class, I discovered that the physical earth and its past can be understood through study of the rocks, landforms and the geological processes that created them. It's satisfying to stand on a mountainside and to understand how the rocks under your feet, which were once mud on an ocean floor, came to form the mountain above you. However, I also have to admit that a major attraction of geology for me from the beginning was that events like volcanic eruptions and earthquakes are truly exciting. I include floods in the exciting Mother Nature events that give geologists an adrenalin-rush. Over the years, I've had the chance to see active volcanoes, floods, and even an earthquake or two. Standing close to Mount St. Helens inside the closure zone and watching an early stage eruption cloud rising into the crystal clear morning sky above us was awe-inspiring. Violent geological events are still exciting. I understand these events can cause human suffering, and feel very badly about that, but these earth processes were happening long before we occupied the planet, and will continue, uncaring of our presence.

As geologists, my wife and I moved often. It was part of the profession. When the kids were about to enter school, we decided it was time to put down roots, and, after a thorough search, chose the Applegate. We were delighted to find a riverfront property. The family liked fishing and looked forward to playing in the water. The river also offered a fun variety of viewing entertainment. We became acquainted with geese, mergansers, ospreys and a whole variety of birds. We were delighted with the occasional otters. We were less delighted with all the beavers. We learned that those beautiful deer on the river bank are actually ravenous rodents in disguise. Over the years, we spent countless tranquil afternoons and evenings watching the many moods and abundant wildlife of the river. And then there was the time we watched an

upstream neighbor's freezer hurrying for the Pacific, carried along in a brown, churning torrent.

Over the past weeks, I've watched the cold storms sweeping in from the northern Pacific and the snow building up in lower elevations and wondered if another exciting event is in store. This is the first ingredient of the pattern that in our valley has created five memorable large floods, along with several smaller floods. These floods have started with the accumulation of lower elevation snow from the kinds of storms we are now having. However, to create a memorable flood, we would also need enough rainfall over a period of days to weeks to saturate our soils, followed by a warm and very wet rainstorm from the southern Pacific. (Our historic floods have included these cumulative ingredients, where warm

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rain quickly melts a large lower elevation snowpack and those who built close to the river learn the dangers thereof.)

Many of us have vivid memories of the New Year's flood of 1997. One of my vivid memories is of that neighbor's freezer bobbing through the four-foot standing waves. Low water bridges, such as that of my mother-in-law, were damaged or destroyed. Fields and roads were flooded, and the water shooting outward from the Applegate dam's wide-open spillways was impressive. Although memorable, it wasn't one of the really large historic flood events in the larger Rogue Basin. Those of us who are older remember

the much larger Christmas flood of 1964. This was the most recent of the five really big Rogue Basin floods. Because I was young and living in Astoria, I don't remember the great Christmas flood of 1955. There's likely someone still living in our Applegate Valley who remembers back to the great February flood of 1927. Even earlier were the great flood of February, 1890, and the granddaddy of them all, the Christmas flood of 1861.

The necessary ingredients for these floods don't come together often, so, despite the early low elevation snows, the possibility of a serious flood this year, as in any given year, is low. We tend to forget about floods during periods such as the past few years, when we haven't even seen high water. On our property, the gravel bar that was created by the 1997 flood has had time to become overgrown with alders and it looks like it has been that way forever. Before 1997, the main channel of the river ran where the alders now grow. I can understand how someone new to the area could assume the current scenery is a permanent situation.

Applegate residents don't have to be geologists to observe that our infrequent flood events move more material and make more river channel changes than all of the cumulative river activities in all the years between the floods. Before 1997, our own stretch of river had rapids and deep pools that were replaced by the flood with the now overgrown gravel bar and shallow riffles. Maybe the next flood will be kind enough to give us back the rapids and pools that we and the kids loved. There could actually be some good in that next exciting event. However, I don't need to see any more floating freezers.

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