

TRENDS AND OBSERVATIONS

Sunsets and new sunrises

BY RAUNO PERTTU

Our lives don't flow smoothly. We live our lives in periods of status quo, where the activities of the days and the years are so similar that each period gives the false impression of long-term stability. Abruptly, events change our lives dramatically, and a new status quo begins. I've just ended a long happy life with my wife Jan. Now Jan has started the last phase of her life as a resident of an advanced Alzheimer's care center. I've also started a new phase of my life, with many decisions to be made and with the hope of a return to a happier time.

I've donated most of Jan's clothes except those she may still need, and those clothes attached to memories that are still too strong. I handed down her jewelry to our daughter. I'm left with a small clutter of items that are reminders of her days, and with the proverbial photographs and memories. It seems like such a small collection for such a special life. Her ski trophies from races past rest on the piano beside photographs of loved faces. The spoon collection she started when she was young now hangs tarnished on a rack on a dining room wall. She bought the spoons in countries that she and we visited over the years. Jan's most important legacy is the memories her family and friends hold and cherish.

As I sit in the back yard, listening to music, and watch the sun edge toward the hills across the river, I think of our lives and the dramatic changes that are occurring. My years as a geologist expand my thoughts into a historical, then a geological perspective. In these perspectives, our lives are tiny portions of a much larger flow of time, life, and events. I apologize if this sounds harsh, but most of us live, love, die and are quickly forgotten. Over a longer time,

the same is also true for the most famous among us, and for countries and societies. Time is a great equalizer. To me, rather than being a harsh perspective, there's a mysterious beauty in the realization. Our lives allow us a brief view into an astoundingly long flow of life and time.

In this larger perspective, we can piece together historical views of the world as it was during the Middle Ages, Rome, Greece and Egypt, but this only takes us back some 3,000 years. How many of us know anything of the world of 10,000 years ago? Even historians and archeologists struggle to learn much about events that long ago.

Although 10,000 years seem like an eternity ago, even historically, when viewed in geologic time, 10,000 years is the blink of an eye. It would take 6,500 of those 10,000-year blinks to reach back to the asteroid impact that ended the reign of the dinosaurs. It would take 25,000 of those spans to reach the beginnings of the dinosaurs. They roamed the world for 185 million years, which makes man's reign to date seem laughably short. Fifty-seven thousand of those 10,000-year spans, or 570 million years ago, is the commonly accepted beginning of advanced life on earth, which was a key point in the long journey that has led to us. The earth slowly became more life-friendly for some four-billion years to reach that point where complex life spread across the planet. It's been a long journey to our current lives in the Applegate.

With apology to those who wait for the world to end soon, I am also awed by the long journey that is still to come for society and humanity, and for life on

earth. Barring unlikely catastrophe, life on earth will continue for a very long time. Depending on whose projections you choose to accept, life will continue on earth for another 600-million years, to as long as 5 to 7.5-billion more years. That's long enough for our children to retire and take a vacation. The shortest projections are based on the calculation that natural processes will absorb most of the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere somewhere after 600-million years in the future,

first killing plant life, and shortly thereafter, animal life. The longer projections are that people, or our future replacements, will be able to adapt to changes and adjust things to continue living on earth until the expanding and warming sun chars the planet about 5 to 7.5-billion years from now. Optimists assume our descendants will have moved to other planets or moons by then. Even the pessimistic 600-million-year projection is such a staggeringly long time that I don't lose any sleep worrying over it.

In thinking about this, I have to comment on an aspect of humanity's future that fascinates me. While civilization has been around for several thousand years, we have only very recently developed the means to record the images and sounds of the world around us. This new ability to preserve events, voices, thoughts, music, and places will have an enormous effect on future societies. Can you imagine if we could actually view the voices and events of Rome, Greece or Egypt? How would it affect our thinking if we could actually hear Plato teaching, watch the Romans feeding the lions, or listen to an interview with

the founder of a major religion? Those were events over the past 2,500 years.

Now imagine that some future ancestor may be able to watch the events of our time, when our time is a million years in the past. In the complexity of intervening events, we and our world will be almost as foreign to that ancestor as are the dinosaurs to us, but he will actually be able to watch us go about our lives, and watch our wars, achievements and disasters in a time and place unimaginably distant to him. We may actually look very strange to him because, accept it or not, we continue to evolve despite having become civilized.

Our descendants now have the potential to actually record the slow changes of environment, plants and animals, and the slow changes of geology that will wear down our mountains, build new peaks, and drag today's continents into collision to form a new supercontinent in the area of today's Southeast Asia approximately 300-million years from now. To us, those events are in an unimaginably distant future, but the earth has time and patience.

As I see the sun set behind the western hills, I feel part of a very long and colorful flow of events and history and wish I could see all the events still to come. Very recently, Jan sat across from me during similar evenings. Sadly, Jan is nearing her sunset. I hope for another sunrise before my sunset. All of us and the world we know will have our sunsets, but there will be interesting new sunrises for a very long time to come.

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Applegate Valley Artisan Bread: Thinking outside the pan

BY RON SHERMAN

Dennis and Pat Larson, owners of Applegate Valley Artisan Bread, resource their organic and whole-grain ingredients locally. Among these suppliers are Butte Creek Mills and Rogue Creamery.

Founded in 2003, the company sells through local retail outlets such as Ray's Markets, Pennington Farms, Medford Food Co-op, Ashland Food Co-op, Whistling Duck, and Fox Run Farms. They also sell directly at the Williams Growers Market.

You can also order directly via www.applegatevalleyartisanbread.com and they will entertain custom orders, with timely customer service also provided online. Gift lines are also available. Originally from San Rafael, California, Dennis Larson attended the San Francisco

Baking Institute, whose business philosophy emphasizes product quality, customer service with a personal touch, and "thinking outside the pan."

Utilizing Alan Scott Brick Ovens, the baking process is a surrounding heat source, yielding breads with an outside crust and inner softness.

Breads are shaped by hand, allowing custom items, with the regular line featuring batards, rounds, and baguettes.

Varieties offered include Country French, Sour French, Whole Wheat, Rye, and Sunflower Flax. Other options are Kalamata Olive, Focaccia, and Cranberry Walnut, as well as pairings with Rogue Creamery that include Blue Cheese Walnut, Smokey Touvelle with Garlic, and

Rosemary Touvelle.

I had the opportunity to sample the wares of Applegate Valley Artisan Bread at the recent grand opening of the Medford Food Co-op, where Pat Larson explained their business motto and the details of each bread offered.

Appropriate qualities that come to mind are savory, deliciously aromatic, mouth-watering, flavorful, and just plain yummy.

I gotta go back for more. And you should try some, too—resistance is futile. I know.

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