

# Your neighbors the skunks: gentle, nonviolent friends

BY GAY BRADSHAW

It's one of those early fall evenings when clouds are pink, blue, and gray—muscular, but peaceful, because they lack the threat of lightning. I'm standing at the edge of the field looking out in wonder at the miracle of the Applegate Valley. My family has had the privilege of living on this sliver of land just over the hill from McKee Bridge for 70 years. Even after all this time, every day is more astounding than the one before.

Meanwhile, my mind, off with the clouds gliding across the mountain, is suddenly brought to ground with something—*someone*—brushing past my leg. Looking down, I see that it is Skunkie—not a very inventive name, but hers nonetheless.

She is an elderly skunk who has shared our cabin—we above the floor, and she below—for at least five years. I know this because I recognize her. When you pay attention and look closely, you see that every skunk is unique. Just like humans, in addition to distinct body shape, size, and ways of carrying themselves, skunks

have distinct personalities. Some are standoffish, others circumspect, others charming. Then there are, like Skunkie, those who are born with a deep sense of equanimity and beatitude.

The striped skunks common to the Applegate Valley are one of multiple skunk species largely confined to North America. Two distinct lineages of striped skunks live around here. One tends to be full-bodied with an ample and elegant plume of a tail, while the other is of smaller frame with a much sparser tail. Baby skunks are adorable. They are miniature scaled-down versions of their parents. Most are wary when they make their first forays outside the natal den. When they spot someone new, their tiny tails pop up so quickly that the young skunk almost tips over, tail over head. Mother skunk is usually nearby to give feedback as to whether the newcomer is a friend or someone to worry about. Despite their ability to give out a very pungent spray, skunks are eaten by coyotes, pumas, and other carnivores. Indeed, their



Good neighbor skunk.  
Photo: Bryan Padron.

method of defense is rarely utilized. They spray out of fear for their lives. The best way to avoid provoking a skunk is to avoid making a skunk fearful.

Skunks have excellent senses of smell and hearing, but, in comparison, their eyesight is quite limited. This is why it is important to make yourself known around a skunk. Do not scream or yell or make frightening motions—just say hello and understand that when skunks spray, it is because they have felt that their lives, or those of their children, are threatened. There have been countless generations of skunks living here—well before our time, well before McKee Bridge

was built. In all this time, we have never been sprayed.

Skunks are gentle, nonviolent beings who go about work and family minding their own business. Like all other wildlife, skunks are focused on making a living in peace. I often see them mingling with raccoons, deer, possums, and wild turkeys. They are integral to keeping the neighborhood in balance by foraging on insects, worms, and larvae. Their digging keeps the soil aerated and healthy. Making a living in the wild is not easy, and there is no time, energy, or reason for bothering someone else. Some skunks, however, go out of their way to be very friendly—like Skunkie.

Her evening stroll past me was not unusual. Not infrequently, skunks weave their way around us while we're outside. One summer, we hosted a family get-together for visiting friends. Halfway through dinner, which was served outside on the grass, a couple of skunks came waddling up and made their way through the legs of the people sitting around the table. The guests were surprised and delighted. The skunks were the highlight of the evening. Skunks are a historical heritage who make us proud.

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## ■ FIRE ENGINE CAMPAIGN

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the community and fundraise for something important. The opportunity was empowering—it led to discussions about our purpose and capacities as an organization and encouraged us to be ambitious in supporting the needs and excellence of the Applegate Valley Fire District (AVFD). We created a dedicated “Facilities and Equipment Fund” to focus our fundraising efforts.

When we asked Chief Wolfard for ideas for a campaign, he hesitated a moment before suggesting a Type 3 Wildland Fire Engine, one of which was becoming available from Ashland Fire District. The \$50,000 cost was daunting—even though it was much less than the \$600,000 price tag for a brand-new engine. AVFD does not have a Type 3 engine, which is the essential engine for fighting wildland fires on rough terrain. This particular engine, while used, is in excellent condition and perfectly suited for the rural and forested landscape of the Applegate Valley. While the cost was beyond anything we've undertaken previously, it took us 30 seconds to realize this was the perfect goal for our campaign.

Working closely with our enormously helpful fiscal sponsor, the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council, we planned the Swine and Wine fundraiser at Red Lily Vineyards. To our amazement, from the beginning of the campaign, sponsorships and donations quickly began flowing in. Two \$10,000 matching grants provided impetus—one from the Josephine Community Foundation and the other from a local donor. The Applegate jungle drums worked overtime, with Facebook posts and emails rebounding around the community. Within three weeks the event was sold out!

On September 18, a few days before the event, we reached our \$50,000 goal, allowing us to acquire this invaluable

engine. Hooray! We then turned our focus to new tires and a new three-inch fire hose for the engine, with a combined cost of \$10,000.

On the big night, Red Lily was at its loveliest and the engine was on display. Excitement was palpable as the yummy smells drifted across the lawn and beautifully decorated tables. Bill Borah and his friend Tim Ryan had been at work all day to prepare the roast pork. As the gathering began, Friends and the AVFD staff and board members could really feel the affection and support from the community of caring people who had stepped up to help with this important effort.

After the terrific meal, the excitement amped up. A cake auction! Thanks to amazing bakers and their enticing cakes, as well as the efforts of auctioneer Jason Straube, the would-be dessert eaters were whipped into a bidding frenzy! This was followed by a unique barrel table and a fiercely contended “firefighter experience,” which went for \$2,000! Combined with the results of a silent auction of baskets filled with local goodies, by evening's end we had raised \$11,000, enough to purchase the tires and hose! Amazing!

What a wonderful community collaboration this effort has been. There are so many people and businesses to thank. For a complete list of sponsors, supporters, and donors of auction items, please see the ad in this issue of the *Applegater*. We are especially grateful to the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council and Red Lily Vineyards for their generous support.

Thank you everyone!

Liza Crosse

On behalf of Friends of the  
Applegate Fire District  
lizacrosse@comcast.net

*Please join us! We are a fun crowd and need your help. Contact Babette at brapp5@aol.com.*

## ■ RAY PRAG

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who shared their quilts, potlucks, life, joy, sadness, and fun. Over the years, more than 50 international horticulture students shared their cultures with the Forestfarm family as Forestfarm shared theirs with them, making them new friends and part of the Forestfarm family...and making the world a smaller and friendlier place. All of these folks, local and international, learned the importance of reduce-reuse-recycle—essential principles for Ray that he lived by every day.

Ray and Peg helped found the Williams Town Council/Citizen Advisory Committee (the first in Josephine County) and the biweekly *Williams News*, both of which helped bring the Williams community together with a heart and an outspoken identity. The Williams Community Scholarship Fund, cofounded by Ray and Peg, has provided scholarships

to more than 100 students from Williams to continue their education.

In 1999, with the help of Peg's brother Lee, Ray and Peg founded Pacifica Garden to provide innovative education leading toward a vibrant and resilient future for the natural world, the arts, and rural communities. Over the years, Pacifica's nature-education program has reached thousands of children in southern Oregon. Pacifica is located at 14615 Water Gap Road.

**In remembrance.** Ray would have asked for and expected nothing, but he would have appreciated a donation to Pacifica, into which he put his heart and soul, or a tree planted—any tree, anywhere! There is also a Remembrance Tree on the Art and Nature Trail at Pacifica where a thought or remembrance for Ray (or anyone) can be written and tied to a branch for the wind to forward.

We will miss you, Ray.

## HISTORY BITS



Applegate School, 1902. Southern Oregon Historical Society photo 15376, courtesy of Evelyn Byrne Williams.

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◀ Cover Photo ▶

A variety of tasty nuts served on Thanksgiving by  
photographer Linda Kappen in her Applegate home.

### ~ IMPORTANT REMINDER ~

In order to assure that your donation is doubled, please be sure to date your check no earlier than November 1, 2024, and no later than December 31, 2024.

*Thank you for your support!*