

"ANYTHING TWO PEOPLE KNOW IS NOT A SECRET."

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"Trailer trash"

by *Dave Featherly*

I did a brief piece in the last issue of The Cheyenne Herald related to an over-the-top-reaction by the county commissioners in their zeal to prevent a property owner from converting a section and a half of land into some sort of development to recoup some part of his land investment.

He had first submitted subdivision plats that were similar in nature to several others that had gained approval in the past - using the same local companies to do the prep work. His first submission was approved 7-0 by the Planning Commission but rejected by the county commissioners. The second was approved 6-2 by the Planning Commission and rejected by the county commissioners.

I didn't spend a lot of time on those subdivision rejections - that will come at a later time. Facing deadline, I chose to write about the haphazard and reckless resolution concocted by the county commissioners to prevent the landowner from moving forward with his Plan C.

The landowner had platted his section and a half of land into 35 acre parcels last October - 300' wide by a mile deep. For effect, he drug four moveable mobile homes on site, near enough to Chalk Bluffs Road to be seen. His only recourse, having been rejected for two sound subdivision plats that would have been approved anywhere else in the rural county, was to create these long, narrow strips of land and market them as a new type of mobile home "haven."

With limited marketing, the rural landowner has far more people interested in acquiring these lots than is necessary to sell the 27 platted.

Failing to end his quest to develop single family homes on the land, the county commissioners reacted in haste and panic to prevent Plan C from reaching fruition. A draconian scheme to penalize those who have chosen to, or have been required to, live in mobile homes, was crafted. Despite living in older homes themselves, they decreed that a mobile home (which includes manufactured housing) over ten years old was not fit for habitation.

All of a sudden, they pretended to have a concern for "safety" in mobile homes. Without consulting anyone with expertise in the field, they pretended to be acting

on some newly-developed data that mobile homes were at a greater risk of fire than a stick-built house. Over the years that one of these commissioners has served, probably hundreds of such county properties have been destroyed by fire.

But not until a landowner had to resort to Plan C did that danger draw the attention of this county commissioner.

As hundreds of his neighbors have lost all of their worldly possessions, the higher risk of fire went unnoticed. Until now. Neighbors may have perished in some of those fires. Unnoticed. Until now.

Do I care where subdivisions spring up? Not much. I know that there are rules and regulations against everything - local and state - and am willing to assume that property owners would have to crawl over all the hurdles placed in their paths by government. And I know that who you know is more important than what you know. But subdivision plats just haven't been a top priority on these pages.

Illegal annexations - yes.

And a regional landfill in that part of the county where these rejected subdivisions would have been - yes.

Had it not been for The Cheyenne Herald, the neighbors who opposed these subdivisions would have had swirling trash on their properties by now. Had it not been for the coverage of Skip Eshelman, those major landowners near the Colorado state line would have been blindsided by a landfill secretly being planned for their neighborhood. I know my good friend Phyllis Atchison gave us the credit and conveyed that credit to her neighbor's at The True Ranch down there.

But what would happen on a piece of land six miles from the nearest neighbor on the southside of Chalk Bluff Road wasn't of much interest to me. Until now.

The idea of mobile homes every 300' along Chalk Bluff probably would not thrill me if I lived down there and would have to see them every day. But except for one opposing neighbor directly across Chalk Bluff Road, no one but those who would live in the narrow confines of this mobile home haven would drive by that area. It is, and has been, wide open spaces and some would like it to so remain. There is no traffic.

For several years, my wife and I resided at the top of Buffalo Ridge - the last developed street on the hillside. When our oldest two grandchildren were very little, and came to visit us from Minnesota, it was special to go through our back gate and across to the barbed wire fence and wait for the nearby horses to saunter over. The kids could touch the horses a little bit and they thought that was pretty neat.

After a few years, someone decided to develop that pasture land. Neighbors came around and wanted me to go to city council and oppose the development. Why? They cited issues but the fact was they just didn't want homes above us on that hillside. It was nice to leave barren. I said I couldn't afford to buy the land to take it out of play and if someone could comply with all that would be required to develop the land, my option would be to move. But I wasn't going to fight someone on something they had a right to do.

Driving along Chalk Bluff Rd., from Hwy 85 to Cty Rd. 138 on the east, is interesting. The first eight miles are paved, then it becomes washboard for the next five miles. At 30 mph, stopping occasionally just to look around, it took me a long time to drive west to east, then back. From where the paved road ends until reaching Cty Rd. 138, there are no structures south of Chalk Bluff. It is a magnificently plain vista - unspoiled by billboards, power lines or wind turbines. There is a quietness, a solitude, a peacefulness that's hard to describe. For miles, nothing fills this great emptiness. No houses. No barns. No roads. Nothing. Anywhere.

I could appreciate why Phyllis Atchison loved her rural Americana as she did

If Phyllis Atchison were still alive, the dispute about subdivisions and a mobile home haven on this land would not exist. She used to tell me that several of her land acquisitions were simply to prevent someone else from buying the land and maybe someday developing it.

I had never been invited to her ranch and I had never, in spite of her disbelief, taken a drive down there just so I knew where she lived. This adventure was my first trip near her paradise.

She knew my beginnings - who had been special in my life and why. She knew I was not born into wealth and privilege but we still created a special bond.

We were so different but so alike.

If I had considered ignoring this story because it touched close to her land, she would have been aghast. She encouraged me to tell the stories. She supported this "advocacy journal" even when we disagreed about issues or personalities.

"If you knew Bud," she said about Judge Clarence Brimmer, "you'd like him." But she never asked me to pull punches.

Once, when I had written critically about Diane (Fogg) Humphrey, she told me, "I've known Diane since she was a baby. She was in my kitchen in a receiving blanket." I know how far back the Humphrey family went with Phyllis' family and how loyal they were and are to each other.

I also believe with all my heart that Phyllis would never have thrown the term "trailer trash" at me as an opponent of developing this land in question has.

I write this account on the third anniversary of the death of a brother who meant more to me than any other male in my lifetime. As I reminisce in my mind about our times together, I come back to the endless hours we spent in his living room, just telling stories and reliving memories.

His living room was in a mobile home.

Many of those most dear to me lived in mobile homes. Three older brothers. My older sister. Nieces and nephews. My dad after my mom died. No one will ever refer to them as "trailer trash" with impunity.

Not being born well-off, I guess I just wasn't raised to look down on people for where they live. Some choose to live in houses on tires and with a tongue, some have few options. But I'd get to know them before forming opinions about them.

I lived in a trailer house for awhile when in high school up in Montana. As transient loggers, it made more sense than buying a house. Initially, classmates may have thought of me as "trailer trash." But it was surprising how, when they saw I could drop 20 a game and get straight A's in the classroom, not to mention date their sisters, those "trailer trash" thoughts became something quite different.

Don't judge people by where they live. People who live in trailer houses are not "trailer trash." Never have been.

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