

# Politicians and Raisins

Know what you're eating. By Barry L. Perryman, Ph.D.

A colleague of mine who I will refer to as Lyle (real name withheld to avoid his breaking my legs) had a couple of interesting life episodes when he was a young boy. In the 1950s he was growing up in the greater Baker, Mont., metroplex that includes Wibaux, Willard, and Ekalaka. This was back in what southeastern Montana locals call the before time, meaning before they had a medical doctor. Prior to the coming of human medicine to the area, the local veterinarian handled all the minor issues.

Human medicine was practiced in Miles City, but that was 80 miles away. It had to be a real emergency for someone to mount the western expedition required to get that kind of medical care. Anyway, the five-year-old Lyle happened to lick the tire rim of the old John Deere D one January morning when the mercury was frozen to the bottom of the thermometer. You know the story, he jerked himself backward and more or less ripped his tongue off. Well, this little episode did not meet the criteria of the western expedition since the old veterinarian thought he could sew it back together. After all, he had sewn up many a specimen in his practice over the years. About 40 stitches later, everything was working pretty well again, although the lower third of Lyle's tongue was twisted a little off-center, causing him to now speak with only a slight, indeterminable accent.

That's not the story I intended to tell, so here is the one I was going to relate before I got sidetracked. Lyle's dad had dug his mother a root cellar one spring after the frost had left the ground. (If you're a veteran of eastern Montana winters like me, you know the ground freezes some years down to a depth of six to eight feet.) Living about 15 miles out, Lyle's family only got to town once every several weeks, so groceries tended to be staples and dried goods.

This particular year being no exception, his mother had purchased a peck barrel of raisins that were naturally placed in the root cellar. In the fall, when she would need them for making holiday goodies, she would bring the peck into the house so she could keep an eye on it. Lyle and his brother were exploring

one early summer morning and found this raisin barrel. It was dark in the root cellar, just a little light from the open door. Of course it was jackpot time for them as they broke the top of the barrel. Anything that was a little sweet was a good thing to these boys and so they availed themselves of this tasty but forbidden, dried fruit.

As the summer moved on, the boys would sneak into the root cellar from time to time and grab a handful of raisins. They



*Photo of Barry (steering) and his brother Bruce taken by their mother Mildred Perryman in 1962. They were visiting relatives on the 1806 Congressional Cherokee Reservation in Middle Tennessee.*

never thought about a day of reckoning when their mother would begin her holiday baking. They just kept grabbing a handful every now and again, and eating it down in the root cellar, out of sight from the patrolling eyes of their mother.

Anyway, the day of reckoning came. Their mother went down in the root cellar in late September and retrieved the opened barrel. The boys were at school. When they got home, she called them into the kitchen. Now you have to put yourself in her place as you read what transpired. She was pretending to be angry, and went through the traditional scolding criteria required by the parents' union. However, it was hard for her to keep a straight face.

You see, about half of the bulk of what was in the barrel was no longer raisins, but dead flies and larvae. Soon after the boys had

opened the barrel, the blowflies found it. All summer long, each time they had gone down into the root cellar to sneak a handful of raisins, they were actually eating an alternative protein source. It was dark in the root cellar you know. I can just picture these two all-American boys sitting in the root cellar, in the dark, giggling as they sneak a handful of raisins and fly larvae to eat.

The last round of political ads (how's that for a transition?) about drove me crazy. Evidently they are designed to do that. You only see one side of the candidate, the one they want you to see. The image portrayed may not even reflect what the candidate really thinks and believes. It's merchandizing. It may even be a scam. It's certainly consumerism, where we are told what to desire, what will make us happy, and what will improve our lives. It is our duty, our responsibility to be informed voters. The framers of the Constitution expected that of us.

I fear a large portion of the voting public has failed these well-intentioned men. So, I'll challenge all of you and myself, to do a better job vetting the political candidate pool we will be choosing from in all our future elections. Make sure they have respect for western landscapes and the people who live and work there. Make sure they have some connection to and an affinity for the land that sustains us all. Without western ranching, mining, and farming, everyday life would be much more challenging than it is. Get out of the root cellar and look the candidates over in the sunlight, otherwise you may not be eating raisins even if you think you are. ■

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