



“Growing Up Girl” In Ferndale

By Lorraine Devon Wilke

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“Growing up girl” is always a mixed bag of experience. It doesn’t matter where it occurs, it inevitably comes with a panoply of messages, suggestions, and influences that cannot be avoided, thanks to the ever-present ticker of cable and Internet. You can be in rowdy New York, some outpost Down Under, or Harmony, CA, with its population of 18 and *still* keep up with the Kardashians, what shoe is a must-have, and which careers are considered “female friendly.”

While cultural noise is certainly louder in our technological age, girls from the beginning of time have dealt with the particulars of second citizenship in ways that have run the gamut from truly hideous to merely inconvenient and, still, in the year 2012, can bump into “expectations” and limitations about where their roads may – or may not - lead. To succeed as a woman anywhere, in any field, and to any degree requires strength, tenacity, and thick skin; all necessary to the task of being female. Which is why it’s all the more impressive when girls, women, *do* succeed, particularly in fields that are typically considered the purview of men.

Right here, in and around [Ferndale](#), we have several who qualify. Caroline Titus owns and publishes, with fierce aplomb, this 134-year-old town newspaper I’m writing for, sometimes at risk to her likeability, her reputation, and even, at times, her well-being. Where men have slogged and shouldered their way in this demanding industry for the better part of civilization (stone tablets sufficing pre-press!), the list of female publishers is a short but sturdy one (check my Huffington Post piece on Ms. Titus and her female publishing cohorts: [Women Of the News: Ferndale's Enterprising Editor, Caroline Titus](#)).

In fact, *The Ferndale Enterprise* has been expertly shepherded by women for quite some time: Hazel Waldner (along with husband, George) ran the show from 1939 to 1980; Elizabeth Poston McHarry from 1982 until 1995, and in 1998, Ms. Titus took the helm. Quite a remarkable roster of female ownership, particularly considering it goes back to 1939, when, in the waning years of the Great Depression and pre-WWII, most jobs of significance were relegated to the “more deserving” men.

Beyond the Fourth Estate, there's the hospitality industry, always a challenging endeavor. Here in Ferndale, one of oldest and most appreciated historical buildings is the venerable [Shaw House](#), now a popular Bed & Breakfast. The Shaw House is expertly run by owner Paula Bigley, whose warm sense of history, gracious hospitality, and delectable – and homemade - breakfast fare combine to make this one of the best accommodation establishments in the area.

In nearby Arcata, the stunning global success of the [Cypress Grove Chevre](#) cheese factory can be directly attributed to its founder, Mary Keehn, who started the company in McKinleyville in 1983 with a few goats and a dream to make really good cheese. She succeeded by all measures (her Humboldt Fog is world-famous and oft-awarded) and although the Swiss Emmi Corporation recently acquired the business, the factory remains in Arcata where it employs a large staff of local workers and cheese artisans.

The history of Ferndale and surrounds is rich with strong female characters, whether “beloved pioneer lady,” Grace Francis, or one of her notable descendants, Grace Shaw, who was instrumental in founding the [Ferndale Museum](#). And of course, one cannot fail to mention the collaboration of Hazel Waldner and iconic Ferndalian, Viola Dorothy McBride, who organized the “paint up” of the town’s Victorians in the ‘60s. If anything has more significantly given Ferndale its vibrant trademark, I’m not sure what it is!

Which brings us right up to the very youthful present. The younger women of town may not be aware of the historical “female power” in their midst; younger girls, after all, typically look forward rather than back. But the DNA is here, handed down from grandmother to mother to daughter. A most recent example is Ferndale High School graduate, Callie Brodt, who has accrued an astonishing inventory of acknowledgements and awards in her young life; specifically the 2012 Coast Central Scholarship, the [Soroptimists of Eel River Valley](#)’s award for “contributions to community service,” and the [William Russ Memorial Scholarship](#) (of \$60K) for “high performance students who plan on attending a four-year agricultural university” (she’ll be attending Chico State in their organic farming program).

Clearly a girl ready to continue the legacy, I asked what woman had most influenced her. Not surprisingly: “My mom. Of course, like any other family we’ve experienced triumphs and trials, but she has always been the one person to never give up. She constantly motivates me to be the best I can be. I think the biggest thing she has taught me is to be humble. I learned to work hard and put my faith first. I have always looked up to my family. Watching them have a strong work ethic, humility, and faithfulness, I, myself, want to be the kind of role model someone can look up to.” I have no doubt she will be.

Someone once said, “It’s the milk,” someone else quipped, “We breed good kids here.” Maybe it’s both. And as for “growing up girl” in Ferndale, Callie put best: “In our small town, most folks come from a farming or ranching background. Over the

years I've been able to watch and learn on a daily basis; things that will help me in my future career. Ferndale, and the people in it, have really helped and supported me to be the person I am today."

You go, girl!

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