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Swiss Immigrant Finds Home in U.S.

By JONATHAN BURTON
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Karl Abbuehl doesn't bother with daylight savings time.

The clock on the wall of his Belle Center Road farm house doesn't spring forward or fall back. It has kept the same time schedule for years, just like Abbuehl. He said it gives him an extra hour in the day.

Abbuehl gets up every day at 4:30 a.m., 5:30 a.m., or sometimes as late as 6 a.m. He never uses an alarm clock. Every morning he goes out, feeds his 100 head of cattle and comes in to make himself breakfast. Abbuehl has followed this routine since he began farming this land at the age of 33. That was 56 years ago.

"I put up all these old building. I put up the house, too," Abbuehl said in a thick Swiss accent.

He built all the buildings on the farm, with the exception of one old barn.

Abbuehl went about his daily routine Wednesday, running water into a trough as he shuffled a few of his cattle out of the barn. The rest, most of the cattle, are on the top 40 of the 163-acre spread. They'll come around at 3 p.m. to be fed, Abbuehl explained as he patted his old dog Babe on the head.

"She's 16. She's slowing-down just like me," Abbuehl said.

In spite of his age, Abbuehl gets up every day of the year to run his farm alone. His wife Ethel died 18



Karl Abbuehl

years ago. Abbuehl could sell the farm and survive comfortably on the profit, but this simple hard-working life is the only way he knows or wants to live.

Abbuehl doesn't do much house work. He washes his dishes, but his step-daughter comes in once a week to clean up and bring him a fresh set of Sunday-type clothes that he rarely wears. She'll wear them out just from washing them, he said.

Abbuehl came to this country from Switzerland as a young man because he wanted to be a farmer. He didn't feel as if the size of his homeland could offer the expanse he wanted. Switzerland was also too cold, he said, and there was no work in the winter.

"I came across when I was 22. I was all alone. I did

not speak any English," Abbuehl said. "I just decided I would go to America and see what the hell it looks like."

When he left, Abbuehl said goodbye to his mother and never saw her again. He took the 10-day boat voyage to New York and then went by train to Wisconsin. It was dairy country," Abbuehl said.

He took a job in a cheese factory, but only stayed three weeks. "I wanted to be on a farm. I'd been around cattle since I was 3 or 4 years old. This is what I like to do," Abbuehl said.

After seven years in Wisconsin, Abbuehl bought a train ticket to Vancouver. "I was single in those days so I just took off," he said.

He took a job at a dairy east of Washougal at the place that is now the Bar-I-Ranch of Sharleen and Ron James. Abbuehl became a citizen of this country and eventually purchased the land on which he continues to raise his cattle. He has since gone back to Switzerland, once with his wife in the '50s and again a few years ago. While he is fond of Switzerland (illustrated by the abundance of Swiss decor in his house), America is his home.

"My home is here. I made a hell of a lot better living over here," Abbuehl said. "I wouldn't go back there to live or to die. Hell no. I wouldn't go back if they gave me the whole (expletive) country."

Life has been good for

Abbuehl here in America, but the farm work is becoming more difficult. His arthritic hands don't work as well as they used to. He has a cataract in one of his eyes. He can't put up the hay like he used to. His wrists aren't as strong as they used to be. "You have to forget about that stuff. You can't worry about it," Abbuehl said.

Despite the fact that he and Babe are slower now, he still puts in the long days, not because he has to, but because it is the only way he wants to live.

"Yeah I put in a long day, but in the winter months there isn't a lot of outside work. I'll take a nap and keep warm," Abbuehl said.

Keeping warm and eloquent swearing are frequent aspects of Abbuehl's speech. He keeps his home a toasty 78 degrees with a wood furnace that burns six to seven cords of wood a year. He harvests sweet corn which he and Babe eat. Abbuehl walks up to where the herd is grazing and picks them out by hand. If he needs to round them up, Abbuehl only needs to use voice commands.

"I just go up there and call them and they come. They know what it's all about," Abbuehl said. "Cattle, they are not so dumb. They are smarter than you think."

Help would be a hindrance at time. The cattle

only recognize Abbuehl. Strangers frighten them, he said, and it is obvious. When Abbuehl walked through the herd Wednesday with his guest, they scattered. He managed to coax a few to his hand, however.

Abbuehl climbed the hill on the back 40 acres of his farm Wednesday. He turned to look back at the valley between his farm house, the barns and where he stood. The green pastures surrounded him, a cow called out for her calf. Abbuehl will never leave this place. He'll never sell the farm.

"When I die they'll sell it. I'll always say you'll carry me off this hill," Abbuehl said.



KARL ABBUEHL came to this county over 65 years ago. He found a home on Belle Center Road where he continues to raise cattle today. Abbuehl walks his field with dog Babe every day to tend his cattle heading out to the "top 40". Abbuehl has a good source of natural water, food, and the company of his dog Babe.