Ex-North-Platters find there's no place like home

Frank Graham (North Platte Bulletin)

Monte J. Boesen loves North Platte. He loves its quirkiness, it’s gaudy veneer, it’s attitude, candor and colorful character.

In fact, Boesen, who grew up in North Platte but now lives in Lincoln, said he finds himself missing his hometown all the time.

“Personally, I wish more towns had that town’s self-esteem, because outside of North Platte life can sometimes taste like a flavorless lukewarm bowl of oatmeal,” Boesen said.

Even though he’s a busy actuary, Boesen stays as connected as he can to his hometown. Several years ago he began a web site called “It must be something in the water.”

On the site are 10 stories about North Platte – some unusual, some odd and some tragic.

Boesen said he made the web site to show his friends his interesting hometown with “its roots deeply embedded in a colorful past.”

“When I went to college in Lincoln, it quickly became apparent to me that most people who were not from North Platte simply do not operate with such a forthright attitude and candor,” Boesen said. “I missed it then and still do.”

Boesen’s family moved to North Platte in 1969 and his parents, Marv and Marge, still live here. His ties to the town run deep and he visits as often as he can.

“It’s a common expression in Lincoln when someone says they are going ‘back to the planet’ for the weekend, they mean North Platte,” Boesen said. “It’s a world unto itself.” Boesen’s web site is at incolor.nebraska.com/mjboesen/Home_Town/Home_Town.html.

Boesen said North Platte’s history of bawdy men and women has made it unique.

“The colorfulness of its characters is its heritage,” Boesen said. “And it still goes on today. Talking to the right people you can hear a new strange story almost weekly that’s distinctly North Platte.”
The stories Boesen posted on his web site are a collection of some of the more memorable ones from local media.

The page leads off with Mayor Jim Whitaker’s boast of walking Naked (the dog) down the street. It then recounts the story of the man who tried to file assault charges against a fast-food worker who rudely threw a pickle into his lap. There’s the man who wouldn’t return his girlfriend’s false teeth until she paid the plumbing bill he’d paid to retrieve them from the toilet, a man who hit his nephew with a shovel, the Big Bonnet, a man who bit a police officer, the Wal-Mart wells and the panty burglar.

Boesen believes those stories are vintage North Platte.

They could have happened nowhere else, he said. They are tales of home.

Boesen remembers he and Dennis Pittman flying a kite when it was 20 degrees below zero outside with a 20 mile-per-hour mph wind from the north.

“We made it on KNOP-TV that night,” Boesen said.

“When I graduated from North Platte High School in 1981, in a class of 356 people, I felt like I was a friend with everyone,” Boesen said. “I run into old friends from North Platte all the time and it seems we share an appreciation of people and place.”

“I may be an actuary in Lincoln, but my mind is 230 miles west,” Boesen said.

Dr. Jim Nevitt, formerly of North Platte Community College and now an instructor at Peru State College, is another former resident with North Platte on his mind.

“I have fond remembrances of North Platte,” Nevitt said. “If it hadn’t been for the people there, I don’t know where I’d be today.”

Nevitt taught here for 21 years.

“It took 10 years for them to stop calling me ‘kid,’” Nevitt said. “After 15 years I was no longer the newcomer.”

Nevitt said he began to learn about education when he started teaching at Mid-Plains.

“I learned to listen,” Nevitt said. “They don’t say much but when they do, you’d better listen to them.”

Nevitt, who said he considers a lot of people in North Platte his family, still visits frequently.

“There’s never a dull moment in North Platte,” Nevitt said.

“I just spent a week there visiting friends,” Nevitt said. “I love them a lot.”

Another ex-patriot, John Gale, said he thinks about North Platte
all the time.

Gale, an attorney in North Platte for nearly 30 years, was appointed secretary of state by Gov. Mike Johanns in December 2000, and moved to Lincoln to assume his duties.

Gale ran for election in 2002 and won with 62 percent of the vote.

“Carol (Gale’s wife) and I take every opportunity to visit all the friends we have in North Platte,” Gale said. “We keep in real close contact with many people there.”

Gale said he enjoys coming to town just to see all the changes.

“We like to drive around town and look at the new high school, the hospital construction and all the other building going on,” Gale said. “Being away, we are really impressed with just how much significant progress is being made there.”

Gale looks back on his North Platte days with fondness.

“We greatly enjoyed our lives there,” Gale said. “It’s a town that’s small enough that one person really can make a difference.”

Gale recalled the boom years of the 1970s and the economic bust in the 1980s.

“In the 1990s we began a significant recovery,” Gale said. “Because of the coordinated leadership there, we’ve caught up with and surpassed what the lean years did to us.”

“It’s a great community,” Gale said. “It’s a town that’s regularly divided on its mission and goals, but that makes for healthy debate. Still, sometimes it’s hard to get people to pull together for a common goal there.”

Gale said he missed his friends and sailing his sailboat on Lake Maloney. In fact, the boat, gathering dust, is for sale.

While Gale loves his job as secretary of state, he said he still misses North Platte.

“It’ll always be home for me,” Gale said. “I’ll never forget it.”

State Education Commissioner Doug Christensen feels the same way.

“If I could do this job from North Platte, I would,” Christensen said. “I would go back to North Platte in a minute.”

Christensen was superintendent of schools from 1985 to 1990. He’s a Nebraskan, but he came here from Kansas.

Christensen said he misses the relaxed, friendly atmosphere of North Platte, and the closeness and involvement a small community offers.

“North Platte was not so big that people felt uncomfortable
talking to me on the street," he said. "In Lincoln, I go to a coffee shop and no one knows who I am.

"I enjoy seeing people on the street and just saying 'hello' to them. You go to a bigger place and that just doesn't happen as much."

Besides, Christensen said, he always liked North Platte's western flavor.

"I like folks who are half professional, half cowboy," he said.

He also likes the weather here better than in Lincoln.

"The humidity here drives me crazy," he said.

Kent Penney, director of the state Department of Aeronautics in Lincoln, lived in North Platte for seven years and loved the town's rich sense of history.

"A lot of historic events have occurred in North Platte because of its geographic location," Penney said. "It's always been at the crossroads of America."

Penney said the people of North Platte have always recognized that role and fulfilled it, accommodating travelers today and long ago.

Both of Penney's children were born in North Platte. He still considers it a special place.

"Everything's convenient in North Platte," Penney said. "Here it takes longer to get around."

"We've still got a lot of friends there," Penney said. "I'll always remember it fondly."

"I think the real meaning of home is a place where you have a true feeling of belonging," Boesen said, "where you find yourself reveling at the thought of simply being there and recalling fond memories of all the remarkable people that you grew up with."

"That's what North Platte is to me."

The North Platte Bulletin - Published 7/27/2003
Copyright © northplattebulletin.com - All rights reserved.
Flatrock Publishing, Inc. - 203 S Chestnut St - North Platte, NE 69101

Talk Back

Thank you for taking the time to write this story! It is good to hear that people who lived here and took the time to put effort and positive support into the community have left here with good feelings about their time in NP! Every now and then we read in the Talk Back a note from some one who left here thinking they were victimized by our town because of some bad experience. They want to blame the town for their problems and make out that whatever happened to them was intrinsic in the nature of our community. I don't see that that is true. If you put effort and work into wherever you live you will feel good about your life at that point. We all choose to live somewhere and I think North Platte is a great place to choose to live!

Posted by Brian - 7/27/2003 5:50:13 PM
You have the microphone. Tell everyone what YOU think.

First Name [ ] (Required)

Last Name [ ] (Optional)

Comments

Submit your response