



Cindy Schwan

Carolyn Ferguson/Special to MDN

The restaurant women of Velva

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Few have reason to know about or remember the little great plains town of Velva, that sits on about 500 acres somewhere near the center of North Dakota. Perhaps its greatest claim to fame is as the home of the late journalist and news commentator Eric Severeid, born there, a one-time resident of Minot, and a graduate of the University of Minnesota. He went on to Europe, where he was the first to report the fall of Paris to the Nazis during World War II. In the introduction to his book "Not So Wild a Dream," he talks about how and when he came to finally appreciate the strength of character in his father, and his acquired appreciation of such strength in others, not strong as in prominent or powerful, but the ability to persevere through all of the vicissitudes and setbacks that ordinary life can bring.

Even though Cindy Schwan at one time lived across the street from Eric Severeid's original Velva home, she never crossed paths with him personally. In a recent conversation with Cindy, I was reminded of that strength of character of which Severeid wrote.

Cindy grew up in a bar. It was called the Mint Bar. It's not what you might think. As a matter of fact her step-Grandma and Grandpa Netzloff owned the bar. Cindy's mom and dad divorced when she was a young child. Her mom, a single parent of five children, supported them by working in the bar, beginning in 1963. Interestingly, it was that same year that if Cindy turned on her TV, she might have been listening to her erstwhile neighbor, Eric Severeid, reporting on the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

Velva was a different place back then, with a population of only about 800 persons. On its Main Street, it had three grocery stores, three bars, two variety stores, two beauty shops, a drugstore, a Taste Freeze, a bowling alley, a bank, a post office, a car dealership, a hotel and (gasp) its own newspaper. Minot seemed a lot farther away in those days and there were no big national stores to draw Velva people away.

It was a good place to grow up. It was nothing on a Saturday, after catechism class, for the kids to take off to play by the river, completely unsupervised. They were expected home for lunch. When assigned to rake leaves, they would stack them up in big piles and make forts of them. There was usually someone with horses who would teach them to ride. They would toboggan in the winter, and sometimes take a shovel with them to the river to clear the snow so they could ice skate. But if they ever engaged in any kind of behavior that was even remotely suspicious, their parents knew about it before they ever got

home.

If Cindy needed to talk to her mom, she could find her working at the bar. When Cindy came home from school, she would stop at the bar and ask mom for her list of home chores, and then go home to do them.

Once Grandma Netzloff happened to mention within earshot of the grandchildren that she needed some milk. Hearing this, Cindy's 4-year-old daughter took it upon herself to walk down to the grocery store and tell Mrs. Hendrickson that grandma needed milk. Mrs. Hendrickson laughed and gave her some, which she toted home. The store settled accounts with them later. In many ways, the entire community contributed to the formation of the young ones. They would have their Girl Scout meetings in the three-story Hotel Berry down the street, because their troop leader, Mabel Olson, owned the hotel.

At 13 years of age, Cindy washed dishes at Emil Silberg's cafe that was part of the by-then defunct bowling alley, and her best friend Pamela Lorenz began her on-the-job training at Taste Freeze from Mrs. Marcella Morrey. Today, after being friends for over 50 years, Cindy and Pamela like to joke that they've been friends for so long they can't remember who was the bad influence on whom.

Don't let them kid you. Pamela describes Mrs. Morrey as tough but fair. She expected a lot from you. If you came to work late, you didn't work that day. She was kind, very tough about her standards, and generous with praise for a job well done. She expected you to learn money management, and to handle the math of transactions in your head. You counted the money and calculated the change without a cash register to do it for you. You were expected to think on the job,

and to remember the favorite dishes and habits of your customers.

Cindy said you were expected to learn the 3Rs before you ever started school. Not reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic, but respect, responsibility and resourcefulness. That last one meant learning how to solve your own problems. Cindy and Pamela both believe they learned most of life's most important lessons right there in Velva.

Cindy got married to a military man, traveled to bases in the states and Europe, had two daughters, got divorced, and supported her children as a single mom through a series of jobs in the restaurant industry, learning different skills from each one. Ask her sometime how she learned to make prime rib for large groups and still manage to have servings available from rare to well done throughout the day.

Cindy's mother married the son of the Netzloffs in 1969. Together they raised Cindy's five children and ran the bar until 1992, when they sold it on contract. In 1995 they got the bar back when the purchaser defaulted. In 1998 the sold it again, to a couple from California. Cindy went to college at Bottineau and East Grand Forks, becoming an invasive cardiovascular specialist. She worked in hospitals in Bismarck and Ogden, Utah, and eventually became a medical traveler.

In 2009, weary of all the traveling, she came back to Minot, bought property and opened Oma's, a small restaurant on the East Side (on Burdick Expressway East, across the street from the butcher shop). I had the pleasure of being served by Cindy at that location before it closed in May 2013 when the property owner decided to convert the building into sleeping rooms for laborers.

Pamela worked for Easter Seals

for the next 17 years as a manager in the warm water therapy pool until they closed. During this time Cindy worked for Pamela as a life-guard. Both of these women are no strangers to either hard work or responsibility, for themselves and for their kids. Both have been single parents and both have managed multiple jobs and parenting simultaneously. Both of them have experienced setbacks in life through no fault of their own.

They are back working together again, this time in The Fox in the Hound's restaurant at Noble Inn, 1009-20th Ave. SE in Minot, where Cindy is the food and beverage manager and Pamela is sidekick. So if you want to ask Cindy about her prime rib experiences, you can find her there. The breakfast buffets are substantial, and Mondays through Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and from 5 to 8 or 9 p.m., the kitchen serves soup and sandwiches, including pot roast. They lean towards an alternative, even eclectic menu. Their BLT for example features six pieces of Applewood smoked bacon, and fresh avocado, lettuce and tomato on cranberry wild rice bread.

They make all their own desserts, and it's been rumored their bread pudding is the best in town.

The hotel general manager, Dennis Gunke, said they are taking a cautious approach to expansion of their offerings, including the possibility of eventual full-service restaurant operations. They are researching what menu niche the local market is ready for and would support.

With people like Cindy and Pamela on the team combined with Dennis' leadership, I would expect good things from this location. Strength of character builds strong communities and strong companies.



HINTS FROM HELOISE

Pickup plan gets sliced

Dear Heloise: I DROPPED A GLASS in the kitchen, and it shattered all over the tile floor. I tried sweeping and vacuuming, but there still were slivers left. I took a slice of bread, placed it over the slivers and pressed gently. The slivers stuck to the bread easily. — Julie, via email

Julie, this old, old Heloise hint came from my mother's column more than 50 years ago! I have said do NOT do this for years, although you can find this out-of-date hint all over the Internet. Is someone looking at old hints books?

This OLD hint is not safe for animals or small children who may get into the trash. Use several damp paper towels; in fact, I think they work better! — Updated Heloise

Burger with cheese

Dear Heloise: After a number of years of grilling cheeseburgers and having to clean melted cheese off the grill, I had a "eureka" moment. I take a slice of cheese, lay it in my hand and fold all four corners into the center of the slice. It makes a smaller slice and eliminates most of the mess. — Mike O., via email

Mike, love your hint! Why clean up gooey cheese if you don't need to? — Hugs, Heloise

No buttermilk

Dear Heloise: I started a recipe the other day when I realized one of the ingredients was buttermilk. I had none. I substituted plain yogurt, and the recipe turned out just fine. — Heidi W. in Pennsylvania

Gold star for thinking this through. This works in most baked goods, but not all. How lucky you stumbled upon it! Baking and cooking can be filled with substitutions like this, which is why I wrote my pamphlet Heloise's Seasonings, Sauces and Substitutes. To order one, please go to www.Heloise.com, or send \$3 and a long, self-addressed, stamped (70 cents) envelope to: Heloise/SSS, P.O. Box 795001, San Antonio, TX 78279-5001. No flour on hand? Try using pancake mix in most recipes, but then be sure to leave out any baking powder or soda listed in the recipe. — Heloise

Packed or loose?

Dear Heloise: Many recipes call for brown sugar, but do you have to pack it in the measuring cup, or can you just leave it loose? — Helen W., via email

If the recipe says to pack, yes, you should. Generally, brown sugar has some "air" in it, so you want to eliminate that. — Heloise

Clean brushes

Dear Heloise: My bottle brushes and other brushes seem to get lost under the sink. I store them in the dishwasher, right in the front, on the top shelf. They are always clean and handy when I need one. — B. Gray, Kerrville, Texas

Add color?

Dear Heloise: A zester is not just for lemons, limes and oranges. For a quick pop of color on any dish I serve, I grab the zester and run it over a carrot or apple. Instant splash of color! — Ray in Connecticut