

Outside the Box: Sacagawea

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Nearly six months after their departure from Saint Charles, Mo., the Corps of Discovery arrived in the upper Missouri country and laid plans to construct a winter fort near the lodges of the Mandan and Hidatsa people.

Lewis and Clark had navigated their way to present-day North Dakota through an unknown region of the Louisiana Purchase by virtue of the combined skills of the expedition force, but they were soon to encounter an



Detail of the mural "Lewis and Clark at Three Forks" by Edgar Samuel Paxson in the lobby of the Montana House of Representatives.

unexpected resource who would play a significant role in their eventual success — a Lemhi Shoshone woman within a few months of birthing her first child.

Her name was Sacagawea, and she would become a central character in one of the United States' most epic adventures. Her knowledge was critical to securing their food; her courage proven when she rescued key documents and supplies after a canoe she had been traveling in capsized; and, together with her child, she became the face of the expedition's peaceful intent.

The exploration of the new territory had been meticulously provisioned, and its leadership prepared by the best minds of the nation, but no amount of planning could have predicted her critical influence on the ability to attain the ultimate objectives of the expedition. Sacagawea was an unexpected blessing, and providence had placed her squarely in the right place at the right time.

Our own Sacagawea

After some 40 years of interactions with successful ranchers, business people, educators, athletes, musicians, artists and leaders, one of the common threads that connects their experiences is the presence of at least one version (both male and female) of Sacagawea in each of their lives. As I have pondered this phenomena in my life, a number of examples come to mind.

It was the spring of 1972 on a breezy spring afternoon on a western Colorado cinder track. At lap 5 of my first 2-mile race, it was crystal clear that I was woefully unprepared



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for success. A shining example of the proverbial “late bloomer,” I was lacking physical maturity, and was far from sufficiently trained for the grueling eight-lap event.

With three laps to go, the weight of self-doubt and a growing sense of futility beckoned me to step off the track. The gap between my father’s state championship in the mile some 20 years earlier and my struggle added to the burden of evidence that quitting then and there would prevent additional humiliation.

“Focus on making it to the turn! One foot after another. Maintain your stride. C’mon, you can finish this thing!” At the moment of surrender, an opposing coach had come to my rescue. The coach from Paonia High met me as I came out of each turn of those agonizing final laps, filling my ears with words of encouragement.

As I stumbled across the finish line and onto the in-field, he slung an arm across my shoulders and softly intoned, “You did it!” For reasons I will never know, someone with no stake in my future had guided me through the wilderness.

Sacagawea would return to my life again in 1977.

“Why exactly are you enrolled in Introduction to Human Development and Family Studies?” The question was asked with a level of fierce intensity to which her Scottish ancestors would have been proud. It was a fair question. Of the 100 or so students in the room, I was one of three males and the only person in the room wearing cowboy boots.

I was the perfect answer to the question: “What doesn’t fit in the picture?”

I stammered out some lame response I can’t recall. She paused, scrutinized my worthiness to fill a seat in her classroom, and then invited me into the study of the developmental process of human beings, complete with insights into life’s transitions, shaping forces that mold people, and the health of relationships with family and peers.

Jill Kreutzer and her colleagues Janet Fritz and Kevin Oltjenbruns would become three of the most influential people in my educational experience. They took me seriously, invested time and energy in helping guide my newfound curiosity and inquiry, and, over the course of the next four years, would provide me tools and perspectives that would influence every facet of my adult life.

Just as that young Shoshone woman had guided Lewis and Clark, Jill Kreutzer helped forge my own journey of discovery.

Do we find Sacagawea, or does she find us? In whatever form she takes, the spirit of kindness that reaches out to the foreigner and the lost matters to us all. If you have met her, then offer thanks. If not — be on the lookout. Finding her matters.



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Members of the National Junior Angus Association pay an annual fee of \$20, and junior privileges expire at age 21. Junior members have access to all services offered by the American Angus Association, and they receive two issues of the *Angus Journal* per year and the NJAA newsletter, *Directions*.

To apply for membership in the National Junior Angus Association, visit www.angus.org/njaa/ and download a printable application, or call 816-383-5100 to request the application.



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