

In The Wake of the Rainmaker

Contributed by Lorna Thackery

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Phyllis Fuhrman knows that some of her neighbors in northeastern Montana think she's nuts.

But if she needs assurance of her sanity, all she has to do is look at the numbers rolling off the account books. Whatever anyone else may think, hiring the rainmaker made more sense to her than anything she's done all year.

Fuhrman, 70, who has worked the land north of Glasgow with her husband for the last 50 years, goes so far as to say the rest of the state is clearly demented for enduring an unnecessary drought.

"It's awesome what this man can do," she said. "We've got wheat coming out our ears up here.

"This man" is Matt Ryan, a 48-year-old rainmaker from Mt. Shasta, California. The Fuhrman's and several other farmers and ranchers in the northeast section of Montana put together \$10,000 to bring him here in early June along with steady rain that has soaked their corner of the state and nowhere else in Montana in this year of withering drought. The Fuhrman's paid \$4,500 of the fee themselves.

Was it worth it?

"We got an average 32 bushels to the acre on 3,000 acres," Fuhrman said. "We've never had that before — never, never, never. We got 27 once. You think it wasn't worth it? I hauled over 102,000 bushels of wheat this fall."

Whatever the cause, Glasgow got 4.67 inches more rain than normal in June and July.

Ryan himself is confident enough in his abilities to assert: "We could have fixed the whole state of Montana." But he is the first to admit there are a lot of skeptics out there.

"The conventional scientists will tell you emphatically you cannot make rain," he said in an interview at his home in Northern California.

And he doesn't entirely disagree.

"I'll tell you flat out, God makes the rain," he said. "But God set things up so that when things get out of balance we can help make rain."

According to Ryan, a little stimulation of the atmospheric energies was all that it took to bring nature back into balance when drought threatened northeastern Montana.

Ryan also claims that with the help of another rainmaker in Oregon — a scientist with a PhD — and an operator on the ground in Helena, the jet stream was coaxed into position above Montana and Idaho in early September, beginning a pattern of moisture and high humidity that tamed the wildfires raging throughout western Montana and Idaho.

"They were very surprised when the weather started breaking in early September," he said. "Nothing indicated that they should have had early fall weather. They weren't expecting anything to change until mid-October. . . . instead, they had higher elevation snows in September and some widespread rains throughout the whole region."

Rainmaking is part art, part science and part religion, and Ryan has been learning the fine points over the last two decades since moving West from New York. He came in search of a Native American named Sun Bear, whom he found outside of Spokane.

"I spent 10 years with him," Ryan said. "He had rain medicine. Wherever Sun Bear went, rain would come. He had been taught by his uncles, a couple of real old-timers who were kids back at Custer's Last Stand. If you wanted rain, well, you prayed for it."

About six months into his apprenticeship with Sun Bear, he chanced upon a meadow where he found a man working with an unusual contraption of metal pipes.

“I approached him and asked what it was,” Ryan recalled. “He told me it was a rainmaker. He was a natural scientist who was an authority on the discoveries of Dr. Wilhelm Reich and he was using the pipes as Reich had discovered, influencing weather fronts.

“So I had been out West for six months and two of my best friends were both rainmakers.”

One of the things Ryan says he has learned is that the space around us is not empty, but an ocean of energy, what Reich called “the orgone.” Water in the atmosphere constitutes an energy system, as does the water on the ground, he said, and the two are connected in ways science has so far failed to recognize.

He uses hollow steel pipes to make the connection. Ryan compares them to lightning rods. The pipes are placed in water and directed at the sky in very specific ways.

“It’s better if the water is flowing or if it’s a large body of water,” he said. “In Montana, I use Fort Peck.”

“There’s a tremendous amount of training and craft involved in it. It was years before I ever did anything on my own. You have to be sensitized to it, to differences in potential in the atmosphere, to a sense of balance in the energy.”

Slowly, the energy starts to change in the immediate area, he said, then it gradually grows outward.

“By very gently using your craft, you turn the atmosphere over gently, starting to attract weather systems,” Ryan said.

“I tell people to look for higher humidity and maybe some showers in the first three days. After five days or so, we can usually see a good pulse of moisture. Then in another three to five days there may be another pulse until the normal weather pattern is re-established.”

Ryan said he can’t make deserts bloom overnight, but he can bring back normal moisture patterns once drought sets in. Once he’s finished his work, Ryan said, the farmers and ranchers in an area that he has visited can expect above-average moisture for at least a month.

The Fuhrmans first called Ryan to Montana in 1992 when drought set in, and then again in 1993 and 1998. It rained those years too according to the Fuhrmans. The Fuhrmans said they wait to call until they are sure everyone in the vicinity has finished planting. This year, Ryan arrived June 2 and was finished the following Saturday.

Despite what the Fuhrmans see as a proven track record, they say it’s still hard to persuade neighbors to chip in for the fee.

“It’s like pulling teeth out of a chicken,” Phyllis said, a little exasperated.

Ryan himself estimates that no more than 25 people in the Glasgow area have become believers.

But he’s used to doubters. He said he and his colleague have gone to the federal government, state legislatures and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and all have refused to acknowledge the work.

“Just as well,” he said. “Who knows what governments would try to do with the ability to influence the weather?”