

Johnnie Rose Rasmussen: The Dignity of Service



We met Johnnie Rose Rasmussen in Needles, California, heading west along the old, historic Route 66. Johnnie Rose has served diners in the Wagon Wheel Restaurant for more than 20 years. She is the daughter of Elva Paul Rasmussen and Melissa Louise Rasmussen, the mother of four children and grandmother to nine.

Johnnie Rose was born in Seattle, Washington and describes herself as a Navy brat. She described her road to Needles as a long story.

“My grandma and grandpa on my mother’s side raised me from the time I was seven. I had my first child at the age of 17. The only reality that I had of what life was from my grandma and grandpa. My mom tried, don’t get me wrong. But the only reality I had was from my grandma and grandpa.”

Although life was difficult for Johnnie Rose growing up, her grandparents gave her a foundation that helped her throughout her life.

“They were good workers,” she said. “No matter what happened, when things got tough, they would keep working. Times get rough, but you got to go on. You’ve got to get the shoes and the food and you can’t be too proud to work.”

“I learned from them that if you have to do dishes to get food, you do the dishes. It’s not beyond you to do any work.”

For Johnnie Rose, life’s difficulties included facing the death of her own child. “I lost a daughter when she was in her teens. It was a bad time. You don’t have reality with that one.”

But it was her work that she claimed helped pull her through. “It kind of kept my mind off it and pulled me away from kids for a while.”

“People say, ‘You have other kids,’ but the point is, you still have a loss. That was my daughter.”

Johnnie Rose says it's the love of her family that she draws on for strength and support. "I have a grandson now who says I'm a sexy grandma! I draw on my son.



I have a granddaughter and I see them and they let me know they love me. And my mom is still alive and she says she loves me."

"I always saw why my kids did things. My girls, they got pregnant young. I was pregnant young. But you have to love them. In my grandparents day if a girl got pregnant young, they would

send them off and send the baby off. But you don't do that. There is a baby there. There is something you can love. One of the girls here was saying something about abortion and some of the people were using it like a legal way of birth control. It shouldn't be. There is a fetus there. We are human."

For Johnnie Rose, her children have brought her the greatest joy in life and her proudest moments. "Probably one of the proudest moments was my son's high school graduation and making sure that (the children) got through school."

"For me, in my time and being in the restaurant business, we were taught cooking and ironing. But now I think kids need their education more. It isn't the same roles with a man and a woman. Now it is more important that you get your education and learn. We need to let our young people know to learn more. Women need to learn more than how is that steak supposed to be fixed."



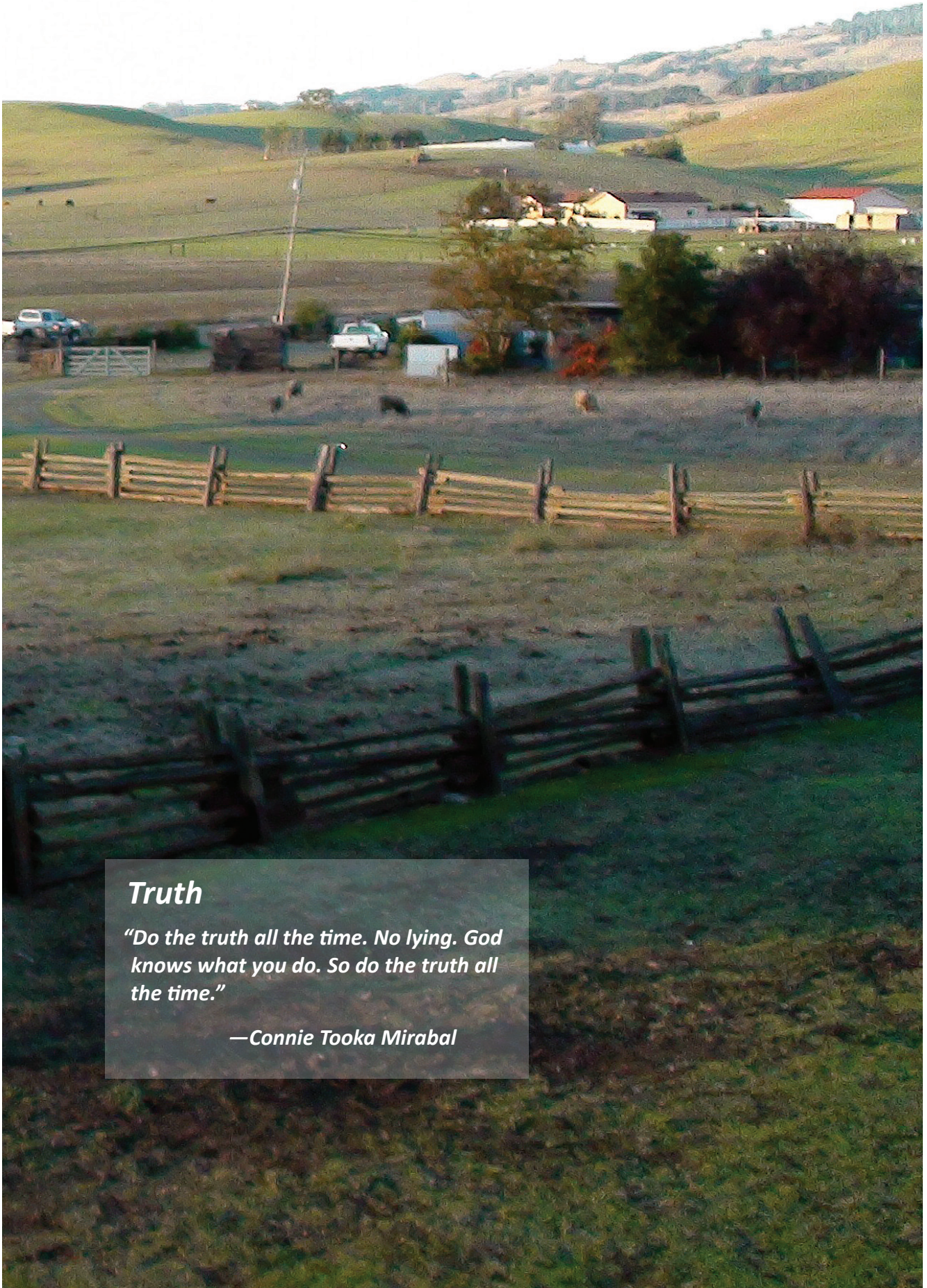
"My most important advice to young women is to believe in themselves, not somebody else, but in themselves."

"The strongest hurt for me after my daughter died was that I remarried a man and I believed in him. But when it didn't work out, it really hurt me because I had believed in him."

“I think I have always believed there is a power stronger than where we are. There is something that happens when you lose a child. I think they are still with you because when things go real wrong and I go into it, everything straightens out. So whatever it is, they are still with you. You don’t ever lose that child and you know they are at peace, because it gives you a peace.”

“I remember that child and I loved each other dearly. I have talked to women that said they didn’t know it when their child died, but I had a feeling and I knew it before we had even gotten the word. I just knew it. But there was a peace I felt because we loved each other. I believe there is something stronger and that is with her.”

“I’m just a little woman, in this little town doing my best, trying to believe and trying to feed people. After all, people need to eat.”



Truth

"Do the truth all the time. No lying. God knows what you do. So do the truth all the time."

—Connie Tooka Mirabal