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Up Front

Euphoria.
By C.J. Hadley

It was before 7:30 a.m. on July 10, 2018, when the phone rang in my big black Ram truck. I was in a parking lot in Sparks, Nev., waiting for my eye doctor. (“Stop using your computer and do not read so much,” was his advice for relief.) Ramona Hage Morrison was the caller. She said, “President Trump has just signed full pardons for Dwight and Steven Hammond.”

I could hardly breathe. I shook. The relief was intense. Through tears, I thanked Ramona and told her we were still waiting for justice for her family. Then I dialed Susie Hammond in Burns, Ore. She was still in bed when Republican Congressman Greg Walden called to tell her the good news that President Trump had just signed “Executive Grants of Clemency” for her husband and son. It took very few minutes for people to be knocking on Susie’s door and calling in from coast to coast, “and I’m still in my nightgown,” she laughed.

Forrest Lucas, of Protect the Harvest and Lucas Oil (and a good friend to *RANGE*),

took his private jet from Indiana to California to pick up those cowboys and fly them home in style from Long Beach to Burns.

A few hours after the president signed the pardons, Dwight and Steve were at the prison gates wearing prison-supplied clothes and holding a credit card valued at about \$200 (the amount they had in the commissary). They waited an hour for Dwight’s niece, Karen, to get out from Los Angeles to pick them up. At the same time, Steve’s wife, Earlyna, was in Sparks, Nev., 382 miles from their Diamond Valley ranch, at Ellington Peek’s Western Video Market sale—a group extremely supportive of this family for years.

The Hammond story is well covered in



Steve, Dwight and Susie Hammond, Burns, Ore., July 11.

RANGE, mostly thanks to Hank Vogler. It can be found at rangemagazine.com (click on “Enemies of the State”). But the life of these ranchers “inside” is less well known.

“For someone like me who has worked
(Continued on page 7)

Miracles in Hage Case

(Full story in an issue soon.)

In the Summer 2018 issue, readers were told about an imminent foreclosure on the Hage family’s Pine Creek Ranch. Due to a startlingly defective Notice of Foreclosure issued by American Title Company, and the miraculous help of several individuals who stepped in to offer financial backing (who are also readers of *RANGE*), the Hages are moving forward to finish the work of their parents. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals made it clear in the April 13 hearing of *U.S. v. Hage* that the court’s rulings in the Hage and Hunter cases provide ranchers the right to remove their vested water rights from federal land via an 1866 Mining Act right-of-way when ranchers are denied access to that water for grazing by either the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or U.S. Forest Service (FS). The Hages are reviewing all options including filing another constitutional

Fifth Amendment takings of property case.

A recent *National Geographic* article about wild horses acknowledged western ranchers have been cut 50 percent in permitted livestock on BLM-administered lands since the range was originally adjudicated in the 1950s. In Nevada, combining both BLM and FS rangeland, that number is closer to 80 percent and many grazing allotments stand vacant. In short, since these agencies have actively crippled the range livestock industry and have, by those policies, generated fuel loads ripe for catastrophic fires, many ranchers may prefer to remove their valuable vested water rights from federal land to put their water to better use elsewhere, or sell it to the highest bidder. Ironically, the government’s 40-year campaign to destroy the Hage family has culminated in turning western ranches into water ranches. ■

For more info, go to rangemagazine.com and click on “Hage v. United States.”

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RANGE is an award-winning quarterly devoted to the issues that threaten the West, its people, lifestyles, lands and wildlife. No stranger to controversy, *RANGE* is a leading forum for opposing viewpoints in the search for solutions that will halt the depletion of a national resource—the American cowboy.

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UP FRONT

(Continued from page 4)

every day, most Sundays and half the nights,” Dwight says, “you go in there and they don’t allow you to do that, so after you get your head taken off you learn to survive.”

Dwight, 76, took the bottom bunk and Steve, now 49, took the top bunk at Terminal Island prison in San Pedro, Calif., on Jan. 4, 2016. There were 60 other men in the room with a partition and a guard in the middle and a bathroom at each end. “There was lots of comings and goings in a place with up to 1,400 prisoners,” Dwight didn’t want to work in the kitchen. “I had a dustpan and broom and my job was to look for scraps of paper around the yard.” He was paid 12 cents an hour and earned \$5.25 every two weeks. Steve worked in the wood shop.

“I didn’t realize that Forrest was a force to be reckoned with. He spent a lot of time in the political world and he was a key person for getting us home. And we can’t say enough about Rep. Greg Walden, who was amazing.”

The Hammonds also give credit to more people than they will ever be able to thank. Most are anonymous and invisible. Many are RANGE readers. Some are powerful. “We got hundreds of letters from all over the U.S. that people were keeping us in their prayers and sending notes to the president,” Dwight says. “We also had tremendous support from the industry.”



On freedom morning, Dwight skipped breakfast and was walking the track. “It’s a quarter-mile long and all of a sudden a bunch of inmates came out to congratulate me. They said I was pardoned so we tried to look on TV but didn’t see anything. Then a guard came over and congratulated me. I asked what it meant and he said he didn’t know.”

Within hours, Dwight and Steve signed a paper acknowledging that they understood that they wouldn’t have any probation and didn’t have to report to a halfway house.

Dwight has spent almost three years in prison and Steve was locked up for close to four of a five-year sentence under the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996—for accidentally burning about 140 acres of brush. Dwight hadn’t seen Susie for 548 days. With an extraordinary sweet and easy ride home with Forrest and a warm welcome—including flags, horses, friends, neigh-

bors and grandkids—it didn’t take long for these good ranchers to settle back into their real life out on the western range.

“I have added a little age,” Dwight says. “Steven and Earlyna are running the ranch now and my grandchildren have gotten big enough to fill my shoes. They are just going



COURTESY HAMMOND FAMILY

FROM ABOVE: *The Hammonds in 2015. From left: Earlyna, Steven, Susan, Dwight, Claire, Corbin and Emery.* ▶ *Forrest Lucas and Dave Duquette enjoy Steve’s first sight of his mom after 548 days.* ▶ *Forrest gets a hug as soon as Steve gets on the ground in Burns.* ▶ *A very happy Susie laughs with son Lyle and local rancher Keith McLean.*



© RAMONA HAGE MORRISON



to have to drag me along best they can.” This includes Corbin, 22, Claire, 19, and Emery, age 13, “who is the real boss.”

What’s it like to hang out with cows instead of cons? “Some people think cow manure smells. I sure as hell don’t.”

What will Dwight do next? “I am on the right side of the bars now and will take orders from my wife and be happy about it. I will work a little bit on the ranch when I can, or for my neighbors when they need help. There are a lot of people who shouldn’t be in prison but I was one of the lucky ones, to receive a pardon from President Trump. Now I am going to smell the roses.” ■