

242. 1987

"At Christmastime he'd buy footballs, basketballs and baseball gloves. He knew the needy families and saw to it that they were delivered to these people."

Kansas events or in Washington. "We're friends now," she says. "I needed a favor I never have — but I wouldn't hesitate to call him."
"We're good friends," Bob agrees. "I knew her second husband and still have contact with her mother all the time."
Of the divorce, he says, "I don't say it wasn't my fault, most of it, but like anything else, even in the House, I was on that airplane every weekend going back to my district. And it's just one of those things. You just sort of... just drifted apart."

That was in early 1972. Later that year he met Elizabeth Hanford, who was assistant to Virginia Kinser, the White House consumer adviser. He was party chairman. She wanted a consumer plank in the GOP platform. The meeting in his office led to phone calls, then a long courtship and marriage in December 1975. She became secretary of transportation in January 1983 after a stint on the Federal Trade Commission and various jobs under President Reagan. They are easily Washington's most powerful couple, and Elizabeth is often mentioned as vice presidential material.



Washington's power couple celebrates Department of Transportation's 20th year.

16

If political, cynical Washington can allow a match made in heaven, the Doles must be one. The transportation secretary is an obsessive with politics and hard work as her husband. She has been an over-achiever all her life, although she prefers to think of herself as merely enthusiastic. She was a whiz kid at Duke University and Harvard Law School.

She was drawn to Washington because it was about the only place that offered much opportunity to women lawyers at the time she finished school. Like Bob earlier, she drifted naturally into politics.

Elizabeth, too, grew up in a small town in North Carolina, not Kansas, but close enough and remembers encouraging parents and special teachers who cared. She, too, had gone to Methodist Sunday school every week. She, too, was raised a Democrat and turned Republican.

She supports her husband's presidential aspirations and feels being first lady "certainly offers a platform from which you can make quite a difference for people."

That is why she's in politics already and is the way she views her current Cabinet position. "I really enjoy being able to go home at night and find we did do something for people today. With safety issues, going after alcohol and drugs and the rest

of it, you know lives are being saved with a lot of these initiatives. That's a source of great satisfaction."

Dole is not a demonstrative man, but he inspires loyalty in his people. "Talk to the people who work for him," his brother suggests. "He may not give them a pat on the back every time they think they've got it coming, and I think that comes from family. It's kind of hard maybe to walk up and congratulate somebody for doing what they were getting paid to do. Know what I mean? My dad never complimented you. Well, we made it anyway. We're still here."

So is a large share of Dole's Senate staff. His personal secretary has been with him 18 years, his executive assistant, 17.

About the only time Dole ever gets choked up in public is when he talks about his grandparents. They were farmers who went bust and had to fall back on welfare. As county attorney, he had to sign the vouchers for the payments.

"At Christmastime, when he'd finally get out of the office, we'd run to the store... and he'd buy five, six footballs and basketballs and baseball gloves and dolls and little toys," Kenny says. "We'd fill up the backseat of his car. And he'd be of course, being in the courthouse, knew the needy families that probably were not accepted or not adopted, and we drove around town and saw to it that they were delivered to these people."

When Dole drops in from Washington, friends gather at the home where he grew up. But often before he sees them, he has made his rounds. "It's already been to the rest home, both of them here. He's been to the hospital, he's seen everybody in there, knows their problems, then he comes to the house to see the people who think they're seeing him first," Kenny says. "You know, they say, 'Did you know so and so?' and Bob'll say, 'I just talked to him.' He takes down their Social Security number. They get a problem and they want help, he's already got the information. You know, he's only been in town 20 minutes but he's made [it to see] all the shut-ins that he could find. And he thinks about these people."

Dole only recently began talking publicly about his long illness and recovery when he launched the Dole Foundation to help handicapped people trying to return to normal life and productive work. It has raised more than \$2.5 million.

But mostly, says Elizabeth, "he just quietly does things he thinks need to be done. And that's just his style. I think he's more comfortable that way."

Don McLeod

INSIGHT / JUNE 1, 1987

COVER STORY
PART 3



The Interstate 70 exit for Bob Dole's hometown, in the state's northwest quarter, is tagged with a symbol of prairie pride.

Where the Seeds Were Sown

SUMMARY: The small Midwestern town of Bob Dole's youth is a place carved out by prairie stock. It was founded on hard work with required strength, and it yielded solid values rooted deep. Those who know him best believe Dole's years on the plains shaped the man more fundamentally and define him better than anything.

It's the first thing they say, just about anyone you ask: You'll never understand Bob Dole until you understand Russell, Kansas. What other town struggling to hold a 5,000 population has two of its high school's prize graduates in the United States Senate?

The fact that one of them is the Senate's top Republican and has a fair chance of being the next president surprises no one here. A Kansan, particularly one from Russell, can do just about anything he pleases. It's a given, not even worth arguing.

The first thing to know about Russell is hard times make people tough. And times are often hard. "Everybody in this county has been flat on his back at one time or another," muses Russ Townsley, publisher of the local newspaper. "If anybody gets a little too uppity, there's always somebody else around to say, 'Well, I knew you when you weren't doing so hot.'"

Russell is in the northwest quarter of Kansas, smack in the middle of the Great Plains. It's pretty country, especially this time of year when the young wheat is green. But it is the kind of place where

pioneers starved to death. "These people worked awful hard out here," says Kenny Dole, younger brother of the senator. "They got off this train out here in the middle of nowhere with nothing. All they had was their bare hands, and they dug holes in the sides of the hills to survive. They built their tools with their hands; they built everything with their hands, and they worked and they worked and they worked."

There were no trees around when the railroads first came through in the early 1870s. Section hands lived in dugouts. The first immigrants lived in boxcars until they could build homes. Along Landon Creek in southern Russell County, families tunneled into the banks and lived there until they could get, much less afford, lumber. They couldn't get fence posts, so they dug them out of the ground. Big 300-400-500-pound pillars of limestone that stand today right where they were planted a century ago. The settlers also built a lot of stone buildings because that was all they had. A lot of them are still standing.

And they brought with them the hard winter wheat that has supported them for the most part ever since. Kansas still produces more wheat than any other state. "I think it's inherent in Kansas and inherent in this area particularly," explains Townsley, who has lived in these parts all his life. "You do what you have to do. And it may not be what you want to do, and it may not be your fault that you have to do it. But if something has to be done, you do it, and you expect it to be done."

Max Horn, who has seen the best and worst that northwest Kansas has to offer in

his 73 years, is president of one of the town's two banks. His lifelong friend and bank chairman, Wilmer Shaffer, is also 73. They both report to work every day.

"We've been here 50 years," Horn says. "Now, if we didn't have a lot of stick-to-itiveness in us, we could retire. We don't have to work. We could survive and our years are numbered anyway. But, oh, you don't quit when the going gets a little tough. That's when you bite into it."

One of the first issues of The Russell Daily News that Townsley put out in the late 1940s contained an appeal for money to help Bob Dole pay for an operation that would restore part of his war-shattered body. There have been many others since. "If, for example, a farmer has tough luck at harvest time, can't get in his field, he's in a hospital," says Townsley, "or where the father has died and the mother can't run the farm, neighbors will come in and do the farm chores, get her straightened around or get things going again."

"The losing of a home, the losing of a farm or part of your farm or... whatever it may be, it isn't the end of the world," Horn says. "My father built a home here in Russell, a nice home, in the '20s. We lost it. Dad couldn't pay for it. It wasn't the end of the world. Sure, we hated to move out of the house. I was 12, 13 — that was tough. It bothered our family. We survived. We survived."

Doran Dole and Bina Talbot, Bob's parents, grew up in this setting. Theodor Banker, who is 82 and still living in the room she was born in, remembers them. "His mother belonged to a large family.

17

"We grew up with a work ethic. The majority of us understood that there weren't any free lunches."



Dean Banker leans on a limestone post.

PHOTO BY JOAN A. REMKOZ/INSIGHT

of his hometown — "a little town." Humor is a small-town necessity. It also is Russell's trademark, and Bob Dole's. But it is not ordinary humor. Says Specter: "It's dry and sometimes it's barby, like barbed wire."
"Unless you could pick up on something that somebody said," recalls Aunt Teddy, "you were pretty, you know, you were kind of doubtful. If a quip came along and there was no response, it was, 'Well, too bad. We'll try another one on him sometime.'"

While she is telling this, her nephew Dean Banker, who is carrying on a family clothing business founded in 1881, is talking to Russ Townsley. Russ picks a loud plaid sport jacket off the rack and asks if a guide dog goes with it. Dean shoots back: "You know, I tried to sell that to a 92-year-old fellow with cataracts and he passed on it. So I knew I'm in trouble right away."

Ask anyone who grew up in Russell what they remember most, though, and they will say the schools. "Because the schools were small enough," says Ruth Wolfe, who was just a few grades ahead of Bob Dole in the same classrooms. "And really we've had excellent teachers, like when I was growing up and Bob was growing up. These teachers took a personal interest in almost any child. If there was talent, they tried to develop it. If it was a child having to do without, they tried to provide the necessary things that would make him or her successful. They couldn't reach everybody, but I think they tried."

"Out in this area particularly you find a real strong religious background, regardless of what religion. It's strong," Horn says. "Church is real strong. And I'm not a religious fanatic. I go to church regularly, yes. But I'm not a proselytizer. I mean, I don't spend my time trying to make other people go to church."
All this produced, and still produces, people with a strong sense of values. "We grew up with a work ethic," says Dean Banker. "The majority of us understood that there weren't any free lunches, that you had to do something. In that background, when you were growing up, you understood that you got a small reward for your efforts, but not necessarily so, and not to ever expect anything extra."

He says when he was coming up in the family business, his father taught him, "Don't ever expect a reward for a job you're supposed to be doing anyway." "There's a real feeling of accountability," says Specter. "Everybody knows everybody else, and integrity is very important. Your word and your integrity are No. 1."

Since Russell is a small town, it allowed people to shine a little more brightly than they might in a larger setting. Says Bob Dole: "I was fairly athletic and got involved in all that stuff. If I'd been in, say, Chicago, maybe I never would have been good enough to be on the basketball team or some other... You might not have had that same drive or that competitive spirit."

I think children in a town as small as Russell, not only are you encouraged perhaps by your family but also through your church, through the schools, through scouting organizations," says Ruth Wolfe. "I think there're just many, many ways that children can be encouraged, and I think that's what it takes."

It is difficult, in Russell, not to be your brother's keeper, an often hidden other side of the rugged independence and self-reliance of the prairie stock.

"My dad used to be the one, if a family had sickness, they would call my dad to stay up all night, although he worked all day long every day," says Kenny Dole. "But he'd stay his three-, four-hour shift and never bat an eye. And at the hospital he did

the same thing, whatever he could do. And he was the first department, volunteer fireman 51 years. Whatever he could do in his own way to repay other people for what they'd done for him and his family — with my dad it was kind of an obligation."

A lot of people say his paralyzing injury in World War II and the years of battling toward recovery made Bob Dole the man he is today, but those who know him best think maybe he had an added edge.

"If there hadn't been the seed and the roots there, he wouldn't be alive right now, and if he were alive, he'd be totally disabled," says Bob Ellsworth, Dole's long-time friend who is now managing his campaign for the White House.

After fighting in World War II, Max Horn went back to his bank and Dean Banker back to his clothing store. Kenny Dole settled into business as an oil lease broker. Bob Dole went to law school, then into politics and eventually moved away. But nothing much has changed in Russell.

A minisize roller rink, in a town where there is not much for young people to do, has a closed sign, skates rowed neatly on their shelves gathering dust. The operators were oil people, and they had to move on when the price went down.

"It's real tough right now because of the cutback in oil prices," Townsley says. "So the town is hurting, the area is hurting. And with the farm income the way it is, it's not far away from the 1930s."
"We're not in real good shape."

When he came to Russell County in 1947 there were 950 farms; now there are just more than 600. "Essentially the same amount of ground is being farmed, but they are larger units and fewer people on them," he says.

When Bob Dole was first elected to Congress in 1960, the townspeople numbered 6,113. At the last census the population was 5,427 and slipping.

Russell suffers from a "brain drain." About 20 percent to 30 percent of the high school's graduates go to college. Only about half of those come back. Townsley has a daughter teaching in the high school, and a son in business in Kansas City, Kan.

And the problems that plague cities have found Russell.

"I think a lot of the children have more problems because we have so many more broken homes," Ruth Wolfe almost whispers. "I heard a year or so ago there was a large number of single-parent families with children over here at this middle school. I think they can be fine — don't misunderstand — but I think it can make it more



Townsley: "It's real tough right now."

INSIGHT / JUNE 1, 1987



Shooting hoops at neighborhood cookout; folks here still "look after" each other.

difficult for them." "That and working parents," picks up Townsley, "both parents working."
"I think that sort of thing has made things in Russell a little bit more difficult with taking care of young children," she adds.

"And we do have some trouble with latchkey children," he says.

But Russell remains as proud as the firstcomers who dug their homes out of those little hills. "We probably lack some of the social programs that you have in the cities, and we probably don't need 'em and don't want 'em," says Townsley. "I think we do a little more here of looking after our friends and neighbors than you do in the cities." Russell has no public day-care center despite the

growing number of absentee parents, "and I don't think the people here would really want one." They make other arrangements.

"Our school was built here years ago — it's now a junior high school — because the people in Russell didn't like WPA," he adds.

Even in the Depression years when the government offered help, the farmers didn't feel right taking it. "My father was in the grain business, and I know," Kenny Dole says. "Farmers came in and they were just destitute, and they had aid offered to 'em, and they just went without it. They just didn't want to accept it. It's not their way. They don't want something for nothing."

— Don McLeod in Russell

18