

# Wallowa County CHIEFTAIN



## Musician Heidi Muller is a triple threat

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Wallowa County Chieftain

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S.F. Tool/Chieftain Singer-songwriter-instrumentalist Heidi Muller plays dulcimer in the living room of her Enterprise home.

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**It's a long way from New Jersey to the Wallowas, but musician Heidi Muller feels most at home here in Northeast Oregon.**

Local musician Heidi Muller comes from the far-flung land of New Jersey. "Rural, northwest New Jersey, not near the cities. We were near Pennsylvania, where it's all farmland," Muller said.

A triple threat as singer-songwriter-instrumentalist, Muller's love of music goes as far back as she can remember. "I was told I walked up to the piano and played a little tune when I was three years old. I grew up in the '50s and my older brother and sister had a record player with 45s which we'd play getting ready for school and I'd just sing harmony to them," Muller said.

Muller learned to play guitar when she was 11 and her expertise is mostly self-taught. "By the

end of high school, I was doing folk songs like Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell and by college I was performing with friends and it just kind of grew from there."

She attended a small college near Boston and majored in psychology. "I worked a bit in the field when I graduated, but I couldn't get far without an advanced degree," Muller said.

Muller left the East Coast to work in Texas for a few years and didn't like it. She had traveled the Pacific Northwest in her college days and heard its call. She moved to Seattle with the idea of obtaining her master's in social work from the

University of Washington. “When I got to Seattle I started playing music and hooked up with other people who played, and I started doing that and school fell by the wayside.”

Muller worked various “outside” jobs as needed in order to help ends meet, but she dedicated herself to a music career.

“I’d work for awhile and make money, then I’d get tired of it and work on music. I taught guitar and dulcimer lessons in Seattle and made nearly as much money as I did working. The only problem with the lessons was people quit in summertime without any notice,” Muller said.

Muller continued the work/music cycle for 19 years and met and formed a songwriters group with Janis Carper, the current executive director of the Wallowa Valley Music Alliance.

In 2000 Muller left Seattle for New Jersey to care for her mother. During that period she met her future music and life partner Bob Webb at a music conference. Although they didn’t see each other for two years afterward, they eventually reconnected and became a couple shortly after that.

Muller and Webb lived in West Virginia for the next seven years and Webb introduced her to teaching music to children, an activity Muller had little experience in at the time.

Muller stayed in touch with Carper, who had moved to the Wallowa Valley. Eventually, In 2003, Muller started booking music tours in the Northwest so she wouldn’t lose touch with the region. Webb eventually joined her and they performed one of their first concerts at Fishtrap House. “We kept coming back because the people are so welcoming here and I eventually taught a summer Fishtrap songwriting class,” Muller said.

Muller and Webb, with the encouragement of friends, decided to relocate to the area. “We could have relocated to Seattle or Tacoma, but we wanted a small town where it’s easier to get to know people,” Muller said.

In 2012 Muller and Webb moved to the area while booking a string of Northwest concerts. They still work as local and touring musicians and as music teachers.

Looking back on her career and influences, Muller named Joni Mitchell as the musician who most influenced her.

A defining moment in Muller’s career came at the Seattle Opera House in 1992 when she opened for singer-songwriter Nancy Griffith at a 3,000-seat venue.

Recently, the company that publishes the famed “Rise Again” folk songbook informed Muller that they intend to publish a song of hers in their next edition. “They called me out of the blue for one particular song and asked me to send some others, and they chose one more that has a connection to this area. It’s called ‘Sacred Ground,’ which has a piece in it about Chief Joseph.”

As to leaving a legacy, Muller says: “As a songwriter, I’d like to know that some of the songs I’ve written have meaning for other people. When I put them out in performance or CDs my intention is that they ripple out from the center and help someone get through the day or a situation.”