Commentary...

Of a certain age...

By Sue Stafford
Columnist

I noticed him as we were being shown to our seats. He sat alone at a table by the window, sipping a beer and pouring over several maps.

His appearance instantly said long-distance bicyclist — shorts, zippered short sleeve shirt, months-long growth of beard, and white raccoon eyes in a heavily tanned face. The giveaway was the well-worn touring bike padlocked out in front – bulging panniers, three water bottles strapped to the frame, and the faded orange flag fluttering in the back emblazoned with the Clemson tiger paw.

As my son, who was visiting, and I settled into our seats and began to study the menu, we noticed the waitress ask the stranger if he minded moving to a smaller table so a larger group could have the one he currently occupied.

No problem and the new diners bought him a beer for his gesture. We couldn't help overhearing the conversation between the six people at his former table and this man with the lilting speech that confirmed a Carolina connection. He was obviously on a monumental trek and was stranded in Sisters on a cold, rainy night, with a full campground and no vacancies in the local lodging establishments.

His new friends were wishing they had room to offer him a place to stay. Josh looked at me and ventured, "We ought to ask him to stay with us," and I nodded in the affirmative.

During our meal, we eavesdropped enough to know this Southerner was on the last leg of the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail. He planned to cross the McKenzie Pass into the Willamette Valley. As we prepared to pay our bill and leave, I leaned over toward the table next to ours and addressed "Dan," as we had learned was his name.

"Dan, we couldn't help overhearing your conversation. Would you like to stay with us tonight? I don't live very far from here."

The grin and immediate sparkle in his eyes gave us our answer. And so began a totally unexpected shift in the weekend that enriched our lives while providing Dan with much-needed rest in a warm, dry bed and a full bathroom to himself.

Offering hospitality to a stranger — not that difficult a gesture, but one I probably wouldn't have made if my son hadn't been visiting. The offer of a place to stay cost me nothing. The guest bedroom/bathroom was ready and empty. Yet such a simple gesture paid huge dividends for all of us.

Josh and Dan shared stories of the road, Josh on his Harley and Dan on his bike. I love to hear people's life stories, and I was regaled with funny, poignant, and amazing tales. Dan had the opportunity to rest and prepare for the final leg of his transcontinental journey.

When the weather the next morning was still dank and gray, I suggested Dan wait another day to tackle Highway 242, assuring him the summit would be cold, wet, and lacking the spectacular views that make it so special. He agreed to stay.

While touring Sisters, Dan discovered Beacham's Clock Co. Standing among all the ticking and chiming clocks, he was transported back to memories of his grandfather, who had repaired clocks and watches. He was enthralled.

I took Dan to see a movie and have dinner at Sisters Movie House, which he found to be a real treat. He couldn't remember the last time he had actually been to a theater to watch a movie, let alone one where you could eat dinner and have a beer.

Sunday dawned sunny and dry and we bade Dan safe travels as he pedaled off toward the end of his journey, which would be in Astoria.

A chance encounter and an offer of what I have – a spare bedroom – provided the opportunity for me to make a meaningful connection with another human being. "Come on in" allowed life to come through my door and broaden my experience.

We all have the opportunity most days to extend that invitation to someone.

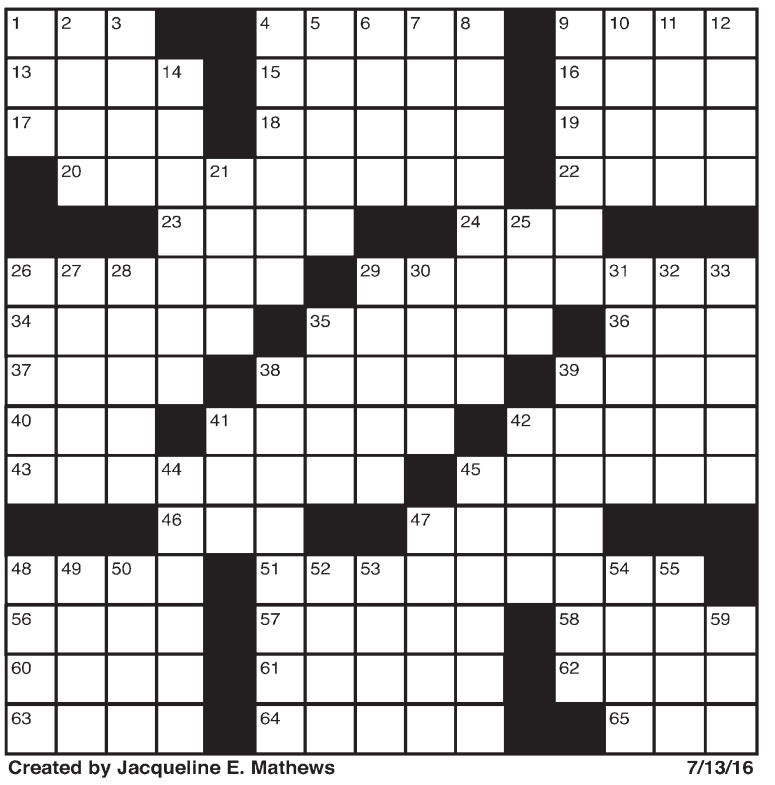
Fear and mistrust are often the hurdles to overcome in order to offer welcome, comfort, rest, and hope. Being who I am in any given moment provides the chance to reach out to others and fill the space that exists between us.

By extending an invitation to a weary traveler, I made a new friend and shared in his adventure, and through his stories meeting the places and people Dan had encountered along the way. He was able to hear our stories, learn a lot about the Pacific Northwest - and get his laundry done.

I have one more strand in my web of life and, after all, isn't that what it's all about? Relationships.

The Nugget Newspaper Crossword

By Jacqueline E. Mathews, Tribune News Service



Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews 7/13/16

ACROSS
1 Lion's lair
4 __ up; absorbs
9 Read over quickly
13 Leave out
15 Loose-fitting upper garment
16 Bum
17 Heat in the microwave
18 Daisylike flower
19 Thomas Kinkade's paints
20 Touchy
22 Delight
23 Items in a set of cookware
24 __ de cologne
26 Bits of parsley
29 Affection
34 Isolated
35 Actress Claire
36 Abdomen
37 Flock cries
38 __ over; studied intently
39 Clerical error
40 For days on __; continually
41 Sheets of ice on the ocean
42 __ off; diminish gradually
43 Saviors
45 Danish, for one
46 __ nutshell; briefly
47 Fissure; split
48 Unexpected obstacle
51 __ up; dividing
56 Caesar's robe
57 In the air
58 Part of speech
60 Trip __; stumble on
61 Chivalrous
62 Sporting event
63 Cushions
64 Rough woolen fabric
65 FDR's follower

DOWN
1 Actor Knotts
2 Huge birds from Australia
3 Athletic shoe brand
4 Indelible marks
5 Kicks out
6 One opposed
7 Ukraine's capital
8 Examined job applicants
9 Military leader of old Japan
10 Form a spiral
11 Capable
12 Snout
14 Bowling
21 Cooking herb
25 Promos
26 Curved sword
27 Glider or 747
28 Streets
29 Taxi prices
30 Singles
31 Cairo's nation
32 "Terrific!"
33 Tale
35 Entryway
38 Nice; cordial
39 Sampling
41 Make __ of; ridicule
42 20th-century U.S. president
44 Cuban exports
45 Like prunes with the stones removed
47 Soldier's gun
48 Go no further
49 __ Scotia
50 Over the hill
52 Farm machine
53 Part of the ear
54 Flood survivor
55 Periodontist's concern
59 Hair bonnet

— Last Week's Puzzle Solved —

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7/7/16

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