#### O P I N I O N



The Nugget salutes all the hard-working people in and around Sisters who labor to meet the needs of our community and keep our economy moving.

# The Nugget Newspaper will be open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on Monday, September 7.

— All standard deadlines remain. —

#### **Letters to the Editor...**

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is 10 a.m. Monday.

A heartfelt thank you and goodbye to Jim and Sue Anderson. Folks and critters of Sisters Country are going to miss you, something fierce.

Judy Bull

To the Editor:

I read the column that Jim Anderson is moving. Tears began to stream as I have so enjoyed reading Jim's articles about our beautiful wildlife, his wonderful family, and our precious world. I want to thank Jim for his life's work and all he has brought to us. The education, beautiful prose, and wonderful insight. I will miss your sage wisdom and wish you the very best. You have made my world a better place and I thank you from the bottom of my heart!

May good health, peace and beauty be vours.

Rebecca French

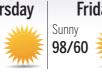
See LETTERS on page 12

#### **Sisters Weather Forecast**

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon















## The Nugget Newspaper, LLC

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### **Dueling with demons**

Jim Cornelius

Editor in Chief

Alcohol and pills, its a cryin' shame

You think they might have been happy with the glory and the fame

But fame doesn't take away the pain, it just pays the bills

And you wind up on alcohol and pills

- Fred Eaglesmith

Amid the litany of travails, disasters and mishaps that have made up the first half of the year 2020, the word came late last month that Justin Townes Earle died of an apparent drug overdose in Nashville. He was 38.

Earle was a phenomenally talented songwriter and guitar player who performed at the Sisters Folk Festival in 2018. He took the stylings of old country bluesmen like Lightnin' Hopkins and Manse Lipscomb, mastered them, and bent them to a contemporary songwriting vision that cut right down to the bone.

The son of legendary Americana artist Steve Earle and the namesake of the wayward troubadour Townes Van Zandt (best known for penning "Pancho and Lefty"), JT seemed doomed to inherit both the streak-of-lighting talent and the self-destructiveness embedded in his heritage. He struggled with addiction from his early teens, and it got him in the end.

The connection between great creativity and reckless self-destructiveness is too commonplace and too self-evident to dismiss. Justin Townes Earle's death caused me to reflect on the fact that most of the artists who move me most profoundly wrestled with demons of self-destruction. Some walked away from the battles battered but unbowed. Some died.

From Caravaggio to Hank Williams to my beloved Texas singer-songwriters, there's a rogues' gallery of the mad, bad and dangerous to know. It's all too easy to romanticize the doomed artist, and I certainly was guilty of doing so in my younger days. With age and a modicum of wisdom comes the realization that the blast radius around such self-destructive figures is wide and desolate, and there's nothing to admire in it. And you have to question whether the self-destruction is really an integral aspect of creativity or a byproduct of something else.

Audrey van Houweling of She Soars Psychiatry in Sisters notes that, "People who have a lot of creativity have a lot of emotional energy behind it. That can be trauma-related."

That was certainly the case for Justin Townes Earle, who never resolved his sense of childhood abandonment by his wayward musician father.

Sometimes the noise is deafening, and alcohol and drugs mute it.

"Sometimes it's a way of numbing that emotional energy that's there," Audrey says.

Those who look on, both repelled and enthralled by the spectacle of an artist coming unwound, are bound up in the drama.

"We like there to be a big story behind somebody's creativity," Audrey says.

"That can be part of that romanticizing effect."

Artists themselves romanticize and rationalize their own actions, and some fear that they will lose their edge if they give up the booze and drugs and the self-destruction. For some, their identity is so tangled up with a self-destructive lifestyle, they're not sure who they would be if they gave it up — even if part of them desperately weets to

of them desperately wants to.
Ironically, Justin's father
Steve Earle is living proof
that a highly creative artist
can successfully decouple
creativity from self-destruction. He came out an epic spiral in 1995 and has been clean
for 25 years — and is a better,
more prolific artist for it.

Demons of self-destruction can hound all kinds of creative people — not just those who are up on a stage. The driven entrepreneur, the social visionary — all are perhaps more susceptible to danger than average folks, although substance abuse and self-destruction can afflict average folks, too.

Getting down to the root of trauma and anxiety is important to overcoming addiction and self-destructive behaviors and impulses. That's hard and scary work — and it's not work that can be done alone.

"Collective support is really important," van Houweling says. "Not trying to do it solo."

The coronavirus pandemic is a slow-rolling crisis for artists and musicians, who are seeing their livelihoods and their very purpose in life shut down, with little prospect of recovery. It's a dangerous time for those who might have a bent toward self-destruction. They're not all up on a stage. Some of them are in our lives. Might be a good idea to reach out and check in and let them know you get it and are there for them.

Because those demons are strong and they are patient and they are always there.