

The Fires of Summer

by Sandra Bishop

"Fire scars on old growth trees at the edge of the Valley attest to Indian fires."

In the 1800's and before, extending back in time to pre-history, the native inhabitants of the Willamette Valley burned vast stretches of land on the valley floor. The Indians burned the land each September to preserve the open oak savannah then prevalent in the valley. Without burning, the land would quickly be overgrown with thick underbrush and the dense fir surrounding the valley would spread onto the valley floor.

Although trappers and explorers passing through the Valley at a time of burning reported dramatic displays of smoke and destruction, the fires usually burned only grass and brush and the land was covered with a lush growth of grasses and other vegetation less than a month after burning. Geese and other waterfowl, as well as deer and small game, were attracted to the abundant growth, providing easy hunting for the native people. Burning also increased the yield of seeds and berries and other wild plant food. Fire scars on old growth trees at the edge of the Valley attest to the Indian fires.

Once settlers moved into the Oregon Territory the way of life of the Indians changed. It is ironic that the pioneers objected to the burning, as it was the annual burning that provided the open, arable land which attracted the homesteaders. By the late 1840's the burning of open land stopped. The face of the land changed. Rolling hills and grassland interspersed with scattered oak became densely forested. The South Hills of Eugene, now prized as expensive home sites because of the thick growth of trees, were grasslands in pioneer times.

But history was to repeat itself. Forty years ago, shortly after World War II, a new agricultural industry blossomed . . . grass seed growing. The growers discovered the most effective way to sanitize and clear their fields after harvest was burning. So, after 100 years of dormancy, fire erupted again on the valley floor. The Willamette Valley accounts for between 60 and 80 percent of the world's production of grass seed. The industry brings

more than \$160 million into Oregon each year.

Regardless of the success of the industry, by the late 1970's smoke incursion into populated areas was a major summertime problem. Summer in Eugene was a bittersweet experience as the warm weather also brought at least a few days, if not a week in late summer, of smoke so thick you couldn't get a clean breath of air in the city. Forest fires and slash burning also added to the problem. In 1979 the Oregon State Legislature mandated a field burning management program.

The management program is run by the State Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Grass Seed Grower's Council. The DEQ is directed to allow the maximum number of fields to be burned with minimum impact of smoke on populated areas. In 1986 there were three hours of smoke intrusion into populated areas in the mid-Willamette Valley. In 1985 there was only one hour of smoke intrusion. This is compared to 27 hours of smoke in the cities in 1982.

The field burning management program is entirely paid for by the grass seed growers. Growers pay \$1 per acre to register their land and \$2.50 per acre for burning. The maximum number of acres allowed to be burned in one season is 250,000. In 1986 199,000 acres were burned. A complex set of measurements including humidity, high and low pressure, wind and temperature are monitored hourly to determine when and how many acres of land can be burned on any given day without infecting the cities and towns with smoke.

Although a little earlier than traditional Indian burning, August is the height of the field burning season. When you're driving up the valley and you see a field on fire, don't be surprised if you see the hazy figure of an Indian stalking a deer, or a trapper walking toward the creek looking for grass for his horse.

If the smoke gets in your eyes, call the DEQ. Their complaint line number is 686-7673.

LITERARY ARTS



FROM LEFT: Double winners Lisa Cohn and Gaines Smith and second-place winner Maureen Jeske.

Local writers scoop up honors

Three affiliated Eugene writers have won literary awards in the past two weeks at regional writer's conferences, and two are double winners in separate competitions.

Gaines Smith and Lisa Cohn won awards both in last Saturday's annual Kay Snow Writing Contest sponsored by Willamette Writers and in the Pacific Northwest Writers Conference Literary Awards. The Willamette Writers' contest was a northwest contest, and the PNWC included entries from all over the nation. Smith and Cohn prevailed over hundreds of writers to win their awards.

At its annual meeting Saturday, in Portland, Willamette Writers awarded Smith First Prize in its fiction writing competition. Smith's winning short story was *Fruitcakespeak*, a story about discord during "an obligatory family gathering" at Christmas. Smith received a certificate of merit and \$100. Only two weeks earlier, Smith also won a certificate of merit and a \$100 cash award from the Pacific N.W. Writer's Conference Lit-

erary Awards. This conference, held in Tacoma, is one of the largest in the country. This year they received over 800 entries in eight different categories. In the fiction competition, Smith's Third Place winner was *Ecs-tasy*, a story about a writing instructor who resents the literary success of one of his students.

Maureen Jeske received second place in the humor category with her story *My Baby the Six Foot Wrestler*, a story about a mother watching her 13-year-old, six-foot son competing in a "dangerous" sport. She received a certificate of merit and a \$150 cash award.

Willamette Writers also awarded a certificate of merit and an Honorable Mention to Cohn for her non-fiction piece, *Still Dancing: One Man's Triumph over AIDS*, about a man's zest for life while fighting AIDS. Two weeks earlier Cohn also won a certificate of merit for finishing as a finalist in the PNWC non-fiction writing competition for her piece entitled, *Classrooms of the Future: A Com-*

puter on Every Desk, about experimental computers classrooms in Eugene and across the country.

Smith has taught free-lance writing through Lane Community College for 13 years. He is also the editor of the statewide distributed fiction anthology entitled *Popular Fiction by Oregon Authors*. "Needless to say, I am very happy that our writers' group has done so well in these competitions. Obviously, we must be doing something right."

Cohn is a free-lance writer specializing in business and science writing. Cohn writes for local and national magazines and writes PR materials for local businesses.

Jeske is a Junction City free-lance writer, currently working on a humor book.

Smith, Cohn, and Jeske are all members of the Free-Lance Writing Seminar, a group of professional and semi-professional writers that has been meeting in Eugene for 10 years.

CYCLE-BI
REPAIRS & CYCLES

Mountain Bike Specialists

1753 W. 18th Ave. 687-0288
Hours: 10-6 M-Fr, 10-5 Sat

GET FAT!
Bicycles from Sekai,
Fisher, Klein and
Fat Chance

New Bike Set-Ups
Nobody does it better!

ELECTRONIC MUSIC

MONDAY 11 PM
THURSDAY 10 PM
SATURDAY 10 PM



KLCC 89.7 FM

NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO

CITY OF EUGENE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT

Public Hearing

Wednesday, August 19, 1987
11 A.M.-1 P.M.

Council Chambers
City Hall, 777 Pearl Street

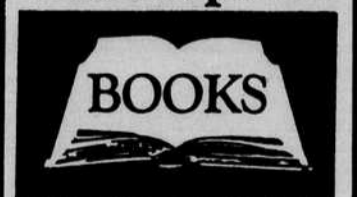
The Community Development Committee will receive ideas for future City capital improvement projects and comments on:

Proposed 1988-89

City Capital Improvement Projects

For more information, call Linda Dawson, Community Development Division, 72 West Broadway, 687-5443.

Marketplace



We have
**Oregon
Souvenirs**

- Ken Metzler's *Best of Oregon*
- Ray Atkeson's *Oregon series Portrait of Oregon*
- Oregon Calendars
- Many other Oregon picture books

5TH ST. PUBLIC MARKET
Corner 5th & High
343-5614