

Quakes are proof: Eugene is no island

Although not close enough to do much damage locally, the recent rumblings of the Oregon earth have nonetheless succeeded in wiping the smirks off the faces of many lifetime Eugene residents, who have long considered earthquakes yet another reason why Oregon is better than California.

The two Oregon quakes that have made the headlines in the past year, one centered in Woodburn in March and another two weeks ago near Klamath Falls, were both comfortably distant from Eugene — close enough to be felt, if only slightly, but far enough away (and weak enough) not to cause any serious emotional distress to people living here.

Still, both quakes have served to raise earthquake awareness locally and have forced government officials to dust off their mostly unused earthquake contingency plans and re-examine the construction codes, which have so far been adequate. But in the event of a truly powerful quake, they may prove to be less than enough.

The common perception of Oregon as a disaster-free, geologically bliss island in a world of natural peril is slowly giving way to the realization that no region is completely safe. Hopefully, however, the nudges that this area has been receiving will result in greater preparedness, without greater panic.

With the possible exception of our large California contingent, students at the University, as well as the local population as a whole, have a responsibility to inform themselves about what to do in the event of an earthquake or other emergency.

It may seem mundane, but taking time to decide what to do in an emergency, from finding the closest exits and the nearest fire extinguishers, may eventually prove to be time well-spent. With all the daydreaming that the average student does during a typical class period, what harm could there be in dedicating a few moments to planning an escape route?

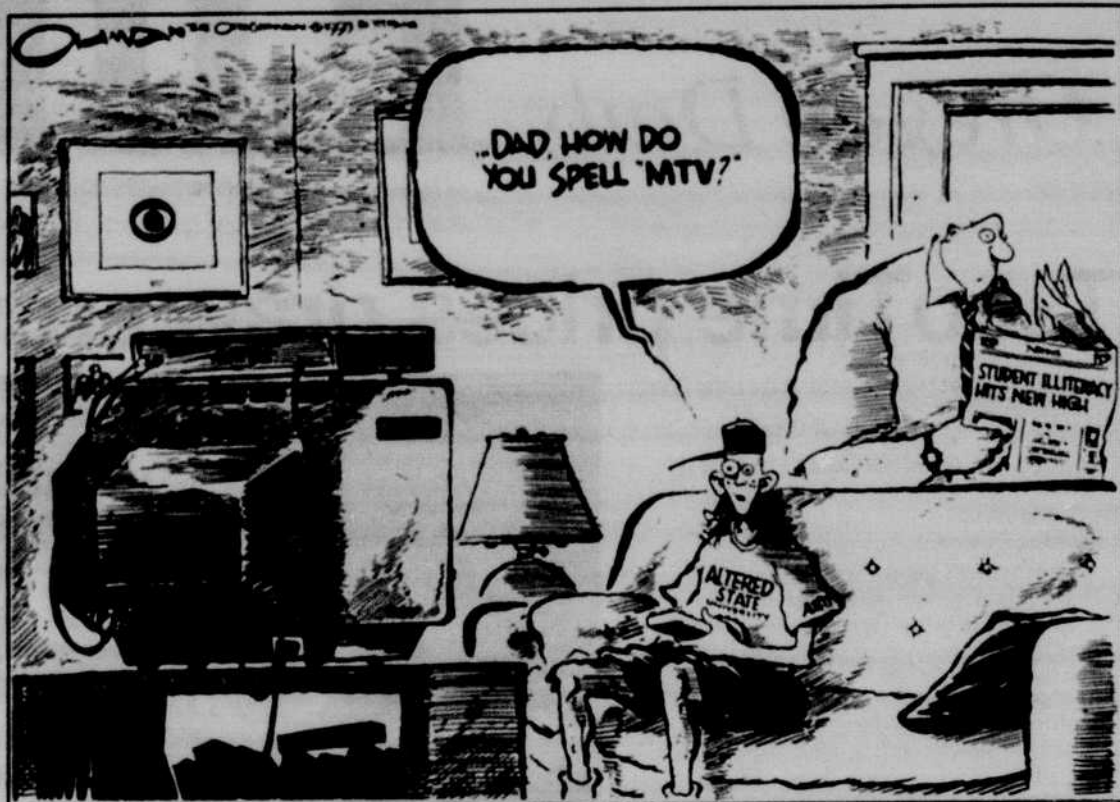
The natural forces at work on this planet have chosen this year to showcase their awesome power. Another earthquake shook southern India Sept. 30, and while it was of similar magnitude to the Oregon quakes, the damage it caused was immeasurably worse. Insufficient construction methods, hardly unexpected in such an impoverished and overpopulated nation, were responsible for the deaths of at least 20,000.

The tragedy in India makes it impossible to ignore how fortunate Americans are to live in a country that measures deaths by natural disaster in tens, not tens of thousands.

Still, the floods in the Midwest this summer, as well as the tornadoes in Virginia and Hurricane Emily along the coast of North Carolina, brought the destructive strength of nature home to America.

These disasters, locally, nationally and internationally, each serve to prove once and for all who's ultimately in charge in this world. And it ain't us humans.

Students have a responsibility to inform themselves about what to do.



OPINION

Student experiences McCulture



KEVIN TRIPP

Some six months ago I made the decision to do the Europe thing this summer. My original plan included meeting an old friend in England and traveling the continent with him.

Unfortunately, his trip was made with the intention of studying abroad, and by the time I could escape the state of Oregon, he would have returned home. So be it, I thought, if I want to do the Europe thing, then the Europe thing I will do: with or without him ...

A few months later, I found myself at London's Heathrow International Airport with a large pack strapped to my back, some Visa travelers checks in my wallet, and absolutely no idea where I was going. Recognizing the name Piccadilly Station on the London Underground map gave me just enough reason to make that my first European destination.

When I made it to my stop, I climbed the stairs to the street level of the famous Piccadilly Square and got my first glimpse of Europe — a Burger King. So began my trek around the continent, with its many interesting and historic people and languages, bars and beers. So, too, began my strange and fattening experience with McCulture.

If you're thinking about making a trip similar to mine and hoping to experience a fresh and completely foreign culture, consider Sri Lanka. The language barrier may be a sticking point, and their occasional civil wars could cut your trip a bit short, but in the end, I doubt you will ever be asked if you want fries with your order.

I, for one, was not able to escape the grasp of the Extra Value Meal (yes, they have them there, too). In almost all of the 11 countries I visited, I had, and

excepted, the opportunity to sample the many versions of America's favorite fast food — McDonald's.

Don't get me wrong, I was by no means a slave to the Golden Arches. Most of my culinary experiences centered around the traditional fare — from fish and chips to bratwurst. Still, I believe I am more enlightened for allowing myself the experience. Although McDonald's restaurants in the United States tend to be more or less identical in menu and atmosphere, I found that their European counterparts often vary a good deal in these areas. Americanization of Sweden is nothing like that of Germany.

So for those of you who are considering a trip to Europe in the near future, and are open to the idea of experiencing fast food a la Europe, I offer to you a brief overview and a few reviews:

The food: For the most part, it sucks. ("Sucks" must be put in context; I know many people reading this think that McDonald's food here sucks, so if you're one of them, it sucks *real bad*.) The portions are generally small, the meat undercooked, and the Cokes watered down. However, the fries were generally pretty tasty, as well as salty enough to warrant another Coke, or, as many locations offer, a cold beer.

The atmosphere: For the most part, a welcomed change from the generic layout of the American franchises. Most restaurants utilized either an upstairs or downstairs eating area, and several had cafe-esque outdoor tables (it is, after all, Europe). Kudos to the Stockholm, Sweden, franchise, which is actually located in the city's central park and features a duck pond next to its patio.

On the downside, and I hate to be judgmental here, but it is true what you hear about East German women, and unfortunately, many of them congregate in the Dresden, Germany, franchise. As well, several locations feature bathroom attendants who don't appear to do much besides sit in the hallway and collect money from the patrons (myself included).

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However, even with my keen observations, I thought I should get an expert opinion on the topic, so I phoned up the friendly people at McDonald's media relations in Chicago. I was particularly interested in their recent expansions into former communist, east-bloc countries. (Specifically, I found the Prague, Czech Republic, franchise a useful means for observing Prague culture — specifically the Prague prostitutes).

And, as it turned out, the folks at McDonald's Corporate Headquarters have also set their sights on these newly introduced bastions of capitalism (the countries, not the prostitutes), saying that they hope to soon have 20 franchises in Moscow alone. Check the newspapers, guys.

Although it does seem, looking back, a little sad to travel halfway around the world just to plug up my arteries with the same starch and fat that I regularly travel to Villard Street for, there is something to be said for these outposts of Americana. I have been in U.S. embassies abroad and have found them about as warm and inviting as the DMV.

The Golden Arches, on the other hand, have a sort of security to them, especially if you've been wandering around a city like Oslo or Milano, where every spoken tongue makes you think what it must have felt like to be an immigrant fresh off of the boat on Ellis Island. After you've put five weeks of backpacking in 11 countries behind you, it's nice to hear the words, "Would you like fries with that, sir?" even if it is, "Mochten Sie gern pommes frites?"

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