

VOICES

# In it for the long haul

By ANN WHITE  
Special to The Observer

We didn't have a perfect marriage. Who does? We had our ups and downs, but we were always a team and faced challenges together — we made decisions together.

We had fun together; we followed our dreams and had a full life, filled with family and friends. I was married to the love of my life for 45 years.

As a widow, I miss not having anyone to share the end of the day with, to check in and compare our highs and lows. I miss his corny jokes, his loyal companionship, touching base throughout the day, discussing our plans, his thoughtful gestures like red roses on Valentine's Day, walking on the beach, holding hands, the cuddles and the connection we shared.

Meals are lonely but I still cook, and shop even though I am not sure when my kids will be able to come for dinner. All I really must worry about is me and my dog, Dixie.

My husband was a banker, he filed all our taxes, managed our investments. I managed our travels, social life, and family business. When he died, I was totally unprepared for all that lay ahead. When you are part of a team, (we tend to delegate certain responsibilities and we work with our strengths) suddenly you are faced with picking up the other half.

There was never a year, I didn't thank my husband profusely for filing our taxes — he spent hours tabulating, researching, calculating and then sending a phone book size pile of papers to the IRS. That has become an annual challenge and a painful reminder of one of the many losses. I have had to put on my big girl pants and take charge of things; make financial decisions that normally we would have dis-

ANYONE CAN WRITE

Nearly 40 years in the business have taught me that readers are bombarded and overwhelmed with facts. What we long for, though, is meaning and a connection at a deeper and more universal level. And that's why The Observer will be running, from time to time, stories from students who are in my writing class, which I've been teaching for the past 10 years in Portland.

I take great satisfaction in helping so-called nonwriters find and write stories from their lives and experiences. They walk into my room believing they don't have what it takes to be a writer. I remind them if they follow their hearts, they will discover they are storytellers.

As we all are at our core.

Some of these stories have nothing to do with La Grande or Union County. They do, however, have everything to do with life.

If you are interested in contacting me to tell me your story, I'd like to hear from you.

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Tom Hallman Jr. is a Pulitzer Prize-winning feature writer for The Oregonian. He's also a writing coach and has an affinity for Union County.

cussed together — the pros and cons.

When death arrives at your doorstep the immediate needs are to hold it together and have a funeral. My husband died in a hospital in Bangkok after the 29 days on the roller coaster in the Intensive Care Unit. In the end, it was a traumatic death.

His wishes clearly outlined in his US Advanced Healthcare Directive were not followed. The doctors had already said there was nothing more they could do. So why not let us be together in peace for those final moments? However, it was counter to "hospital policy." Instead of allowing him a peaceful death, they performed CPR pounding his chest with a team of three orderlies until my son and I could not take it. We begged them to stop.

I was not unfamiliar with being at the bedside of loved ones. First with my father, the night he died; then my mother — when my sister and I were nuzzled next to her in her queen size bed as she took her last breaths. Then with my mother-in-law who I was able to spend her last five days in Hopewell House a beautiful hospice home. She had the most peaceful death of them all. Sacred Flight had sent a

harpist to play by her bedside as the family gathered around her. My husband and I were on each side of the bed holding her hand as she took her last breath.

The funeral rituals and ceremonies for my husband lasted five days and I am sure he would have been moved by all with the outpouring of love from the hundreds of people who attended, his colleagues that sponsored different nights and the many contributions and support that were freely forthcoming.

It has been six years since my husband died and, in that time, I resolved the estate, closed our Thai company, I downsized our living space and moved to a smaller apartment; shipped the excess furniture to our "retirement home" in Portland; and then over two years closed my Marriage and Family Counseling practice; and finally said goodbye to our amazing and supportive circle of friends that were our other family. In 2018, I shipped the rest of our life's accumulations back to the US and officially retired to Portland. I have been trying to make a different life than the one we had as a couple. COVID was another blip on the screen — life has not been normal for some time.

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## COVID-19 Vaccine

Other vaccine events offered in December:

Location: Center for Human Development

Time: 10:00 am to 2:00 pm every Friday with the exception of New Year's Eve in addition to Christmas Eve.

Additional options: Scheduled appointments available throughout the week.

Vaccines offered: 1st dose, 2nd dose, 3rd doses and booster vaccines. All Covid vaccine configurations will be available including pediatric vaccination. Other pediatric and adult immunizations also available at CHD.

CDC General Vaccine Info:

COVID-19 vaccines are effective

COVID 19-vaccines are effective and can reduce the risk of getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Learn more about the different COVID-19 vaccines.

COVID-19 vaccines also help children and adults from getting seriously ill even if they do get COVID-19.

While COVID-19 tends to be milder in children than adults, it can make children very sick, require hospitalization, and some children have even died. Children with underlying medical conditions are more at risk for severe illness compared to children without underlying medical conditions.

Getting children ages 5 years and older vaccinated can help protect them from serious short- and long-term complications.

Getting everyone ages 5 years and older vaccinated can protect families and communities, including friends and family who are not eligible for vaccination and people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Booster Information from CDC:

Fast Facts Everyone age 18 and older is eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine booster beginning Nov. 20, 2021. Some people are strongly advised get a booster dose to protect themselves and others. You can choose which vaccine to get. The COVID-19 vaccines are extraordinarily effective at preventing serious illness, hospitalization and death. That said, we are seeing immunity drop over time, especially in people over age 50 and those with compromised immune systems who are more likely to experience severe disease, hospitalization and death. For these people, another dose boosts their immunity, sometimes greater than what was achieved after the primary, two-dose series. Health experts strongly recommend people over age 50, people over 18 who live in long-term care facilities, and anyone who received one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine get a booster dose. Younger, healthy people may also get a booster dose to protect themselves and others. A booster will re-build neutralizing antibodies that strengthen the body's ability to fight getting a breakthrough case. Even if you're not at high risk, you could be infected and then pass it on to others, such as children too young to be vaccinated, the elderly, or people who are immunocompromised. Booster doses help people maintain strong immunity to disease longer. The first vaccine series built up the immune system to make the antibodies needed to fight the disease. Over time, the immune response weakens. A booster dose stimulates the initial response and tends to result in higher antibody levels that help people maintain their immunity longer. Boosters take about two weeks to bring up the immune response. This continues to be studied, but we can reliably say it takes two weeks to bring the immune response up to or better than that after the primary series.

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