

Voices In My Head: Mother Nature

By P.J. O'Leary

The worst side of Mother Nature and the best parts of human nature rose to the surface in Vernonia on the rain-soaked day of December 3rd. I can't imagine how we could thank all of the friends and neighbors, the volunteers and rescue crews who helped us so much on that day and in the days that followed.

While I understand that none of the help provided was given with the hope of recognition, I feel like I need to thank a couple of people from "flood day." At about 1:00 PM, with a good two hours of mail left to deliver, I needed to get back over the downtown bridge to finish the mail route. My wife Leslie, who had been rescued by Lee Siebert (thanks Lee), told me I wouldn't make it back over because of the flood level on Grant Avenue. Being a typical husband, I ignored her advice. I might have made it if the engine hadn't killed. There I was, floating back and forth like a turd in a public pool.

Anyway, I've got two people to thank for saving my butt that day. Curt Bernal, who pulled me out of the wash, and Loren Dennis, who helped me get the rest of the mail back to the Post Office. Without them I'd be the mailman in Wheeler now because that's how far I might have gone before they fished me out of the Nehalem River. These guys represent the best parts of human nature that I alluded to earlier. I'm still a big fan of human nature.

Mother Nature I'm not so sure about. It seems to me that she is one twisted chick. Sure, she's the one who gives us flowers and trees, wildlife and rainbows and those snowflakes we catch on our tongues. She's also into hurricanes and tsunamis and heartbreaking floods. "Oh, that's just Mother Nature," we say. Is she wearing some kind of Teflon housecoat with reflective fuzzy slippers? Let's stop giving Mother Nature a free pass.

Imagine how different your childhood memories would be if your mother treated you like Mother Nature does. There you are, all snuggled in your warm bed. Mommie has finished your bedtime story, tucked you in and given you a big kiss. She then steps out into the hallway, puts on a hockey mask and starts up a chain saw. That's the kind of mother this "Nature" lady is.

Or maybe she'd put you in a nice warm bubble bath with your duckies and boats. She'd pinch your cheek and say "I brought you your Easy Bake Oven to play with too. Let me plug it in for you."

I don't know much about this postpartum stuff, but you would think she would have gotten over it by now.

Safety Matters

By Chief Mathew Workman

The Flood of 2007 is over but the rebuilding of the Upper Nehalem Valley continues. Daily we have seen the massive destruction and frayed lives being rebuilt. I have mentioned my tremendous pride watching emergency responders, friends, neighbors, family and strangers pulling together to try to help each other out in this disaster. The resiliency of the valley residents continues to amaze those who are viewing our peril from a distance. Though we were and are down we are most certainly not out, nor will we be any time soon.

I want to publicly thank all of the numerous police agencies who helped supplement our manpower to ensure we had twenty-four-hour coverage. The fire department has also received help from numerous departments to ensure adequate fire protection for the district. The outpouring of volunteers, corporations, and agencies was not only amazing to see but helped restore faith that people do still care about those in need. To everyone, too numerous to mention, I want to say thank you and would like them to know if they are ever in need, we will be there for them!

As with the Katrina Disaster, many scammers are seizing the opportunity to prey on the generosity of the public and the vulnerability of victims. Even with the smaller scale Vernonia Flood there are Red Cross Donation scams trying to get people to contribute money. An elderly woman in Aloha was telephoned and asked to give credit card and bank information to the caller. Never give out personal information to anyone on the telephone. Other scammers have been going door-to-door asking for donations. Any monetary donations should go through the legitimate accounts set up at the Wauna Federal Credit Union and US Banks. If you feel you have been contacted by a scammer or if you are the victim of any type of crime, be sure to report it to your local police.

Governor Kulongoski and Attorney General Meyers are warning both storm victims and the general public about scams. For the general public they advise that though Oregonians want to help meet the recovery needs, crooks often try to capitalize on the generosity by soliciting for non-existent charities. Charities authorized to solicit funds are registered with the Department of Justice and can be confirmed by calling 971-673-1880 or by going online at www.doj.state.or.us/charigroup. There are also numerous charity watchdogs that can be found on the Internet. For victims, the Governor and Attorney General advise you to be cautious of consumer scams. Avoid unlicensed contractors promising immediate, cheap home repair or tree removal. Phony clean-up crews and tree-cutting services may begin soliciting services with an advance deposit on future work that is never performed. They reminded everyone of Senate Bill 118 that was passed in 2007 outlawing price gouging in selling basic products and services during certain times of emergency. More information and reporting mechanisms can be found on the AG website at www.doj.state.or.us/. All of this information can also be found on the VPD website under the "Storm Scams" link.

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