

## New in Town: See You Around

By Shannon Romtvedt

January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011, marked the one year anniversary of my move to Vernonia. Aside from toasting a Happy Anniversary, I believe with a water glass and a coffee mug over breakfast, there's been little fanfare. But it's made me more reflective. For me it's a big deal to be here. It's the place I now call home and the community I support.

Though I will live here many moons and through many groundbreaking and Jamborees before I'm considered anything but New in Town, I've decided to step off the podium and make this my last column. Several of my highlights from this past year as well as many day to day experiences have been printed in this paper. I'd like to continue sharing my stories but I think it's time for me to broaden my support of Vernonia and help out in other ways. And who knows, I may start sharing other people's stories. There are plenty of tales to tell.

It was hard for me to decide how to say goodbye to this column and those of you that read it. It's been a profound experience for me and I'm thankful to Scott Laird and the Vernonia's Voice for supporting my idea.

I spent a couple days opening and closing the cover of my laptop, deciding to read and watch the snow fall rather than stare down a blank page. Then, after reading a particular chapter in Brian Doyle's *Mink River*, I was inspired and ready to write. Brian Doyle is a local author and his new novel is about a small coastal town in Oregon and the big and small stories of its people. One of the many characters in this fabulous book is a man living out his last days in the doc's office, reflecting on his life, love, and town with a twelve-year-old boy. "These things matter to me, Daniel, says the man with six days to live. They are sitting on the porch in the last light. These things matter to me, son" (p. 195). He goes on to list things from salmonberries to fresh-mown

lawns to his children learning to read.

So, in honor of Vernonia, I'd like to list things that have come to matter to me living here. These things matter: The music of the creek. The first deep breath of clean, cold air in the morning. Walking an old railroad grade. Seeing my home from a viewpoint at the top of a hill. Exploring downtown with a 5-year-old. Planting my first garden. Buying tools at the hardware store. Buying liquor at the hardware store. Being recognized in shops and restaurants. Checking out books at the library. Writing for the Vernonia's Voice. Canoeing down Rock Creek with my husband. Turning the canoe in Rock Creek and chasing after the paddle. Driving under railroad trestles. Riding my bike over a railroad trestle. Riding my bike up Keasey Road. Touring the rock shop. Learning to identify trees. Wrapping my arms as far as they could wrap around an ancient cedar. Watching the leaves appear. Watching them change color and fall. Waving

back to waving kids on the side of the road. Watching the snow fall. Making a humongous snowball. Identifying animal tracks in the snow. Seeing the lights downtown during the holidays. Eating breakfast at Café 47. Having draft beer at the Lyons Den. Playing ping-pong at the Cedarside. Hosting ping-pong tournaments at my house. A friendship festival. New friends. Two cats named Toni and Rama. A dog named Babe. Playing with kittens at Creatures. Friendly veterinarians. Cheering on the salmon journeying up the creek. Watching a deer leap into the water and swim down the creek. Watching a bald eagle fly up the creek. Greeting a blue heron. Resting in my hammock and listening to the water. Riding my bike on the Banks-Vernonia trail with family. Looking at old pictures of the town. Learning the history. Meeting the people. Coming home.

Thank you Vernonia. So long and see you around...

## THE INKWELL

By Lynn Berry

Hey all writers, creators, and artists, I am calling on you to keep writing, creating, and inspiring.

Winter continues, with its long frosty nights, giving us at least a few more moments of peaceful solitude, which offers us extra time for thoughtful reflection and writing. There is an essential element to personal and spiritual growth when one takes the time to courageously look at things as they are instead of what we want them to be. These moments help us to create and strengthen the parts of ourselves we need to release, and the parts of ourselves we need to develop.

Below is a poem by the well-known poet, Robert Lowell, who writes about a middle point in life, a point where the poet is now able to look realistically and comparatively over his past and towards his future with a deeper understanding and perspective of himself and of his father who walked before him:

### Middle Age

Now, the midwinter grind  
is on me. New York  
drills through my nerves,  
as I walk  
the chewed-up streets.

At forty-five,  
what next, what next?  
At every corner,  
I meet my father,  
my age, still alive.

Father, forgive me  
my injuries,  
as I forgive  
those I  
have injured!

You never climbed  
Mount Sion, yet left  
dinosaur  
death-steps on the crust,  
where I must walk.

---Robert Lowell (1917-1977)

Lowell aptly exemplifies the significant shifts each one of us experiences when we are capable of honest and selfless reflection, especially when the insight proves our character to be disappointing at best. When we invite the artist within us to emerge, we

grow and enlarge our minds, and our hearts open; we begin to understand people and situations in ways we were once unable; we begin to respect what we don't understand; we become compassionate rather than judgmental, and we relish in the beauty and in the ache that life brings to each of us.

---**Writer's Idea:** Think about how the poem above, and your own poetry, or your own life's experience reflect the quote, "Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness" ---- Eckhart Tolle. Write about your insight and connection to this.

---**Writer's Tip:** Make a list of some of your perceptions that have changed over the last year to five years. This should give you some ideas for writing material on your own transitional shifts.

---Please send your original submissions to, (or if you would like a copy of any of the published poems in their entirety), [InkwellVernonia@msn.com](mailto:InkwellVernonia@msn.com) or by mail: PO Box 333 Vernonia, OR 97064. Please include your name and contact information. Engage--Create--Expand.

Lynn Berry holds an M.A. in English, specializing in feminist literature and literary criticism. She has spent several years teaching Literature, Composition, Poetry, Creative Writing, and Critical Thinking at various school districts and colleges, and occasionally provides writing workshops.

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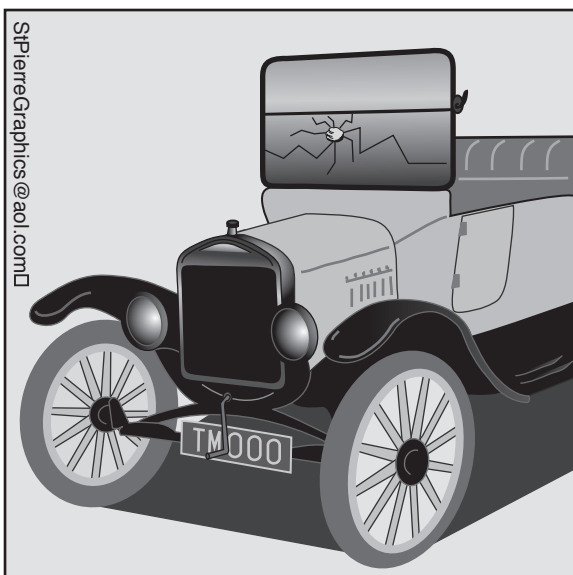
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