

# The Boys (and Girls) of Columbia County *continued from front page*

in the works at the Vernonia Grange sometime soon. Copies of the CD will be available for purchase at the Vernonia Pioneer Museum.

The history of the songs Seamons and *Timberbound* have recorded flows deep and wide. Kim Cunnick is the widow of John Cunnick; the two lived together in Keasey, an old logging camp about twelve miles outside Vernonia. It was the mid-seventies and Kim and John, both musicians, lived in a wooden shack with no electricity or running water. Together they played music and wrote a small collection of folksongs. Kim



and a few paying gigs. The highlight of their career was touring with folk singer Mike Seeger and playing on Governor Robert Straub's porch for 1000 Friends of Oregon.

In 1977 Kim published the *Timberbound Songbook*. The songbook included photographs by Jenelle Wiggins, an accomplished local photographer, and captured John and Kim at the cabin in Keasey and other people and landscapes of the region. The cover artwork was created by Hyde. It contained the lyrics, music and introductions to the songs John and Kim had written and random notes

mostly wrote the tunes and John provided the lyrics and some of the melodies. John died tragically in a car wreck at the age of thirty and was mourned by the wide circle of friends he made in his short time in Keasey. He was buried by his friends at the end of Keasey Road, his body wrapped in a quilt and placed in a handmade casket with a carved banjo of cherry wood on the lid, made by friend Tony Hyde. An apple tree was planted to mark John's grave.

Kim honored his legacy by forming the *Timberbound Stringband* (later shortened to just *Timberbound*) with some of their musician friends. They played some of the music John and she had written together at parties

that John had jotted down about being a musician. It even includes a photo of John's casket at his funeral, a photo of Kim, Kytr and Berge playing together at the funeral and a photo of the *Timberbound* band together. It's a wonderful tribute to a creative genius who lost his life much too early.

*Timberbound* disbanded in 1978 having never entered a recording studio to memorialize John and Kim's songs. Kim moved away and remarried; she currently is an innkeeper in Costa Rica. Kytr and Berge continued to play together occasionally and recorded the album *Dog Salmon and Rutabagas* in 1985, which featured songs about commercial fishing, logging and life in

the Pacific Northwest.

The music and stories, and especially the songbook that John left behind made him a local legend of sorts. Several musicians recorded his iconic song, 'Boys of Columbia County,' but beyond those few tributes to his life and the fading memories of his friends, the legend of John Cunnick laid dormant over the next thirty years.

John had run away from his home in Ohio when he was a sophomore in high school but his friends knew him as self-educated, well read and very, very smart. He worked in sawmills around Vernonia to make money. His song lyrics

were often about his work experiences ('Another Good Maul,' 'LongHaired Worksongs,' 'Reotruck Drivingman') and about life at the cabin in Keasey ('Vine Maple Valley Waltz,' 'Same Old Wind,' 'The Winter Was Long') The songs were a mix of ballads and upbeat bluegrass numbers with intricate and clever lyrics that mention a litany of local lore and landmarks - the Spar Tree Cafe, the Nehalem River, Lew's Bar, Pittsburg and Keasey.

His writings in the songbook reveal an intelligent, imaginative and entertaining sense of humor. In Kim's introduction to the songbook she includes a description of John that he wrote about himself: "...he has come to be known as the mad epistolator in some circles as a result of cabin fever & the precipitous nature of Oregon winters."

I had to look up 'epistolator' in the dictionary when I read that quote. An 'epistolary' is a writer of letters; the word "epistolator appears to be of John's own creation. That's the kind of writer John was. The more time you spend contemplating John's small body of work, the more you come to recognize his creative genius and expansive view of the world he inhabited.

In June of 2010 Kim returned to the Keasey property where she and John had lived and joined Kytr, Berge and Loring for the weekend in a *Timberbound* reunion. They spent the time visiting with old friends, playing music and even went into a cabin and recorded some of their songs. The musical playing and the



*Timberbound is Kate Sandgren, Gavin Duffy, Joe Seamons and Jenny Estrin. Photo by Emily Rome.*

melodies were a bit rusty but the spirit was revived. Joe Seamons was there that weekend and was enraptured by Kim's stories.

The *Timberbound Project* was born.

Seamons had studied music at Lewis and Clark College. "I was already exploring and performing the *Timberbound* songs at Lewis and Clark a couple years before the reunion," says Seamons. "I played both 'Fisherman's Life' and 'Timberbound' at one of my music recitals where I was featuring the music I was interested in."

As Seamons' explorations and curiosity led him more deeply into the *Timberbound* song lore, he came across some of the very few recordings of John and Kim's music that had been made. In 1974, Alan Wax, a friend and musician himself, brought a reel-to-reel tape recorder to the cabin at Keasey and recorded John and Kim.

"Alan was one of the first people to recognize how special they were and that what they were doing should be captured," says Seamons. Local Vernonian Gary Everett gave a Joe a CD that included some of those first recordings, as well as live recordings of the *Timberbound* band playing at the Woodcracker Theater. Seamons says he studied those recordings as he developed the arrangements of the music that are on the new CD.

Seamons began gathering musician friends and performing songs *continued on page 13*



## Judge Martwick gives back to the Community!

### She is dedicated to Equal Access to Justice:

- She spent 17 years helping poor children, teens and adults gain fair and equal access to the judicial system.

### She is devoted to the education of our youth:

- She is a volunteer speaker for the St. Helens High School civics class.
- She invited all the local schools to bring their students into her courtroom.
- She was a participant in multiple high school, college and law school mock trial competitions.
- She helped children become active citizens by volunteering for the Classroom Law Project and the Oregon Youth Leadership seminar.
- She was a volunteer judge for Beaverton Teen Court: teenagers who are cited for low level crimes are brought before a jury of their peers who impose a sentence. It is very effective.

### She helps children in need:

- She worked directly with CASA and the Citizen Review Board on many dependency cases. She represented many children whose parents were unable to adequately care for them.
- She also represented children of highly contested divorce for free.

### She helps people with disabilities:

- She is the caregiver for her disabled veteran son. Through her son's disability, she became a Family Education Teacher for the National Alliance on Mental Illness. She represented many people in Civil Commitment Hearings.

### She helps people who struggle with addiction:

- She served as a member of the Columbia County Drug Court and the Washington County Drug Court. She is the judge for the Columbia County Juvenile Drug Court.
- She also served as a Board Member on the Columbia River Partnerships for Change which supports the Columbia County Drug Court

### She wants to help Veterans:

- She hopes to start a Veterans' Court in Columbia County. The Veterans' Court would work as part of a coordinated service response to veterans who find themselves involved in the justice system.

### She helps the homeless pet population:

- She was a long term board member and foster home for Animal Aid Inc.
- She advocates for spaying and neutering. She also assists her son in fostering a disabled dog for Columbia County Dog Control.

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