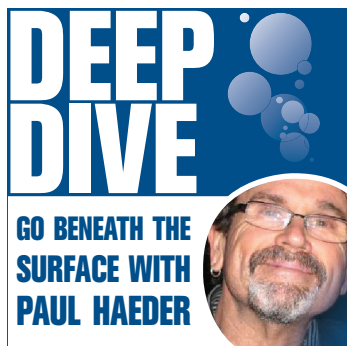


The collector

Down and Out in Portland — Retired in Style in Waldport

The famous quote from the Dustin Hoffman movie, 'The Graduate,' is not wasted on Duane Snider:

"One word: plastics."



That was Benjamin Braddock, just graduated from college, sitting in a swimming pool. Giving him advice on attaining the American dream, the neighbor's statement says it all. Today? Hedge funds? Flipping houses? Coronavirus repossessions?

For Duane, that one word: portwork.

We're sitting on the back porch of his brand-new Adair home on a third of an acre on the high land of Waldport. He and his wife, Linda, are proverbially happy, fat and sassy in this new iteration of their lives.

He went to Benson high school, when it was an all-male segregated school. It was during the Vietnam War, at the height of the draft.

Just a few weeks earlier, Duane and I ran into each other on the beach near the Alsea River emptying out into the Pacific. Loons and eagles started the conversation, and quickly Duane recognized me by my byline for this newspaper. He had purchased a piece of art from one of the people I have featured in Deep Dive — Anja Albosta, artist and environmental refugee from Yosemite see Dec. 16, 2019, "Art in a changing climate").

Duane is 68, and his wife — originally from Sonora, CA — is 67. Duane's work life is quintessential drudgery millions of Americans called working stiffs have faced. In his case, 39 years working at one place, grinding optics for an optical service in Portland. It was for Duane 20 years in a hostile work environment where his boss bullied him. There was no real upside to the job — a repetitive job tracing lenses and frames and low pay.

He conveys to me that for more than a decade he was highly depressed, even suicidal.

"I could see the Ross Island bridge. Daily, I would look out the window and fantasize jumping off it. Even planning out in my mind how I'd have to aim my fall just right as to hit the bike path just to be sure."

Alcohol and drug abuse were a big part of his life, but to his credit Duane has been clean in sober going on three decades. His addiction to substances was eclipsed by another addiction — art collecting. He has been a fixture in Portland's art scene for decades — a gallery gadfly, and someone who ended up with smart and strategic ways of appreciating art and purchasing it.

He's a veritable encyclopedia of Who's Who in the Oregon art world.

It's not so unusual Duane would have gained this proclivity for art appreciation and deep regard for art's role in society as something bigger than commerce, industry and day-to-day drudgery of commercialism.

When he was a youngster, he studied guitar. He was good enough to end up switching over to classical guitar in the style of Andres Segovia. He has taken a master class from the best — for guitar taught by Michael Lorimere, who was a classmate of Christopher Parkening in master classes with Segovia. That was 1975.

"I knew I was going to have to take a vow of poverty if I was going to try and pursue being a musician."

Duane's father was a union baker and not very involved in the boy's life. For the just-turned-18-year-old Duane, his cohorts were going to be drafted but he was talked into enlisting. "A friend said the navy, since it wasn't the army. Anything but the army. But that was nuclear submarine duty and I was claustrophobic. There was no way I was going on a submarine." Instead, he ended up in the air force. He even tried the conscientious objector route.

Military life was short-lived when he was drummed out as a 4-F. They found traces of codeine in his drug test. "Ironically, I had done all sorts of party drugs." It wasn't the LSD he dropped they discovered, but the codeine, the psychedelic from which it was titrated.

Music out, optics in

"If you want the present to be different from the past, study the past.

Everything excellent is as difficult as it is rare."

— Baruch Spinoza

He was homeless for a few months.



Coming back from Lackland AFB, Duane ended up working with the crippled children's division of OSHU. He took a second master guitar class at Berkley. "I knew poverty was going to be a regular part of my life. I wasn't that good. I took classes with trust fund babies. Money wasn't an issue for them."

Here's where things really get prescient — "I had a poster of Picasso's 'Old Guitarist' on my apartment wall in Portland. I was studying with extraordinary musicians. I wasn't about to spend 10 or 15 years in poverty."

The "Old Guitarist" was painted in 1903, just after the suicide death of Picasso's close friend, Casagemas. Picasso was deeply sympathetic to the plight of the disenfranchised and downtrodden. He painted many canvases depicting the poor, sick, and outcasts of society. In fact, Picasso was penniless during 1902.

It's an amazing painting in the style of El Greco. That moment for Duane Snider turned into a life passion — sacrificing part of his soul in that daily grind in order to enter another world: one that was rarified, filled with the passions and creativity of artists just like Pablo Picasso.

When he returned from Berkley, he ended up in a friend's parents' house. He applied to Portland Community College, talked to a counselor, told her he wanted to find a steady job, one that was reliable. "I wanted something recession- and depression-proof. Optician fit the bill." He ended up taking psychology and philosophy classes awaiting the term to start for his major.

He grabbed a job at a lab his second term. He parlayed that into a full-time gig at Columbian Bifocal. The first 20 years it was a family-run place, and the last 19 years it ended up as one of 17 labs for Hoya, a

Japanese investment group.

Good benefits, steady work, and a bully boss. "We hated each other. It's amazing I survived."

He hands me a DVD of an OPB special featuring Portland art collectors. Duane is profiled. He laughs, recalling how he had read about the great philosopher Spinoza's life as a lens grinder. What was good for the father of rationalist and deductive reasoning had to be fine for Duane Snider's life.

Not so ironically, the dust from lens grinding led to Spinoza's early death from tuberculosis.

The amazing number of artists Duane has met propelled him to write essays on art for a local art rag — NW Drizzle. Here's what he penned in 2005, as he emphasizes, he was "just coming out of a four-year bout of suicidal depression."

"When I gave up the guitar, I couldn't give up my need for a place to put my passion. It seems natural that my passion migrated toward the visual arts. Giving up playing music meant letting go of a sizable part of what I thought was my identity. My search for a new sense of self played a major role in pushing me toward the idea of collecting.

That's when I started learning that the real value of art is not determined by the price on the sticker, but by the strength of the connection between the viewer and the object of interest."

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Read on as Deep Dive continues at www.oregoncoasttoday.com.

Paul Haeder is a writer living and working in Lincoln County. He has two books coming out, one a short story collection, "Wide Open Eyes: Surfacing from Vietnam," and a non-fiction book, "No More Messing Around: The Good, Bad and Ugly of America's Education System."