

Impact still remains after 25 years

Today marks anniversary of Mount St. Helens' 1980 eruption

Aura Cameron

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On May 18 in 1980, at 8:31 in the morning, Mount St. Helens was still the mountain that had come to be called "America's Fuji." A nearly perfect cone, St. Helens had for years been a popular place for hiking, camping and other outdoor activities. Pristine forest blanketed its lower slopes and the surrounding hills; on clear days the mountain was reflected in the clear blue waters of Spirit Lake.

A minute later, Mount St. Helens changed forever. At 8:32 a.m., an earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale rocked Mount St. Helens. The quake triggered a massive landslide, one of the largest in recorded history.

The whole north face of the volcano collapsed, suddenly exposing the gas-rich magma that had been forcing its way under the mountain to much greater pressure. The magma and surrounding rocks exploded, creating a dense, fast-moving cloud of superheated ash, rocks and gas called a *pyroclastic*

flow. Pyroclastic flows can roar down off a mountain at speeds in excess of 150 miles per hour; the second, superheated avalanche overtook the collapsed north face in a matter of seconds. The heat of the eruption melted the glaciers on St. Helens, triggering a series of volcanic mudflows, or *lahars*, that flowed down every river system connected to the mountain and reached as far as the Columbia.

The eruption of May 18 is often referred to as the "catastrophic eruption," and it's easy to see why. Ash from the eruption fell in measurable quantity in 11 U.S. states; the ash cloud itself circled the globe within a matter of days. Hundreds of acres of forest were leveled by the tremendous lateral blast.

Landslide debris filled Spirit Lake, leaving it reshaped and nearly 200 feet higher than before. The lahars caused massive flooding and fouled the shipping channel in the Columbia. 57 people were killed in the eruption, including United States Geological Survey employee David Johnston, whose last words, radioed frantically back to the USGS base in Vancouver, were simply: "Vancouver! Vancouver! This is it."

That was 25 years ago today. In the quarter-century since the famous eruption, other forces have wrought changes on the mountain and the debris slope that was once the north face. These changes, while slower than the ones made on May 18, have been nearly as incredible, and have given scientists the world over a unique chance to observe how nature heals itself.

The blast zone and debris slope, described as looking like "a war zone" or "the surface of the Moon" after the eruption, are gaining their old ecology back faster than was anticipated. Where once there was only bare, grey ash, now flowers bloom in the spring and elk browse on healthy shrubbery. Johnston Ridge—named in honor of the man who died there—is accessible to the public and houses the Johnston

Ridge Interpretive Center.

The Interpretive Center is full of interactive and fascinating exhibits and will teach one more than one ever thought possible to know about St. Helens.

On clear days, the observation deck provides a truly spectacular view across the debris slope and up into the crater—so if you ever go, be sure to take a camera! The whole area was made into the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument in 1982 for the purpose of preserving the area for scientific study, so you are asked to stay on designated trails and to not remove any material from the monument.

As if in honor of its own anniversary last fall, Mount St. Helens reminded us that she is the most active of the Cascade volcanoes by giving off several minor eruptions of steam and ash. A massive new dome has also formed in the crater, splitting the newly-formed Horseshoe Glacier in half and sending local volcanologists into fits of glee. Activity continues, with the dome growing at a rate of around five feet per day.

It is humbling to think of the forces that changed Mount St. Helens 25 years ago today; such massive destruction and creation is well beyond the reach of humans without the help of atomic weaponry. One is left awestruck by the sheer power of nature and the incredible, unexpected beauty that power has wrought.

25 years to the day that the face of a mountain was changed forever, we should count ourselves lucky that we live where such things can be experienced.



Contributed photo

A quarter of a century ago today, Mount St. Helens erupted, flowing hot magma and scattering ash over 11 states.

FreeGeek doles out free computers

Mike Guidice

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FreeGeek.com's slogan is, "Helping the needy get nerdy since the beginning of the 3rd millennium."

Freegeek.com is a non profit organization that recycles used computer technology and provides people from around the world with no-cost computers. The site was founded in 2000, and since its inception has recycled over 360 tons of electronic scrap metal and remodeled over 3,000 computers.

Most of the work is done by volunteers who disassemble the donated

computers and test all the components. The metal pieces are either recycled as electronic scrap or put into refurbished new machines.

In exchange for only 24 hours of one's time in the recycling center, located in southeast Portland, one can earn a "FreekBox" computer. The computer comes equipped with free software that allows you to do just about anything along the lines of word processing or internet use. The computer also comes equipped with a basic tutorial on how to use the machine to the fullest of its potential.

For more information on donating your old computer or other computer-related hardware one might have lying around, simply

visit FreeGeek.com. Upon entering the site, one will also be presented with the option of learning how to build their own computer or earn a PC.

So if you're trying to unload some old computer parts and want to put them to good use, check out FreeGeek's website.

Also, if you're ballin on a budget and are in the market for a computer with internet and word processing capabilities, take a minute to browse their website.

Make a difference and help yourself by helping someone else. It doesn't take much time or effort, and it's an experience you surely won't regret; you've got nothing to lose, so check it out.

Writers' Club Contest Winners

Fiction:

- 1st Place: Liz Hart, "The Smell of Cows"
- 2nd Place: Elizabeth Miles, "A Guy Thing"
- 3rd Place: Seth Wilson, "Bad Things Happen, Some Never Exist"

Creative Nonfiction:

- 1st Place: Ryan Jones, "Live and Let Die"
- 2nd Place: Carl Graham, "The House"
- 3rd Place: Roxanna Matthews, "Our Last Night in Camas"

Poetry:

- 1st Place: Liz Hart, "Knowing or Not"
- 2nd Place: Linda Knowlton Appel, "Body Armor"
- 3rd Place: Liz Hart, "If I Were a Mother"

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