



THE OREGON STORY



BREED LINE REGINALD MARSH

Reginald Marsh

On Theories Trickled Down

by Michael Ireland

The city wakes up to the sporadic flow of cars rolling down the street, carrying passengers to the day's work. I watch them drift by, my breath condensing into clouds of vapor in the morning crispness. Standing here in the cool dawn, in this line slowly building in front of the unemployment office, I feel empty and cold. After three and a half years at a steady job, I have been laid off. The construction industry is in economic chaos, its immediate future bleak.

The subdued line grows longer, the people silent, lost in their own thoughts. When I look into their eyes, their gaze falls to the pavement. It is a sad and lonely line, tense and apprehensive.

The doors of the building swing open, and the thin stream of humanity flows slowly through them. Forms are distributed, filled out and collected. I am herded into a room with about a hundred other people. I am lectured through the confusion of paperwork and regulations that now will govern my life. I discover that I will have to learn to live on half of what I was earning before.

Maybe I'm not ready to deal with the stark reality of my circumstances yet; but somehow, I think, we'll make it. I talk to others less fortunate.

There is Bill, a lumberman. He has been bringing home pretty good money for five years now. It is the only trade he knows. His wife cannot work; the job market has no place for her limited skills. They purchased a home three years ago on a progressive mortgage. They will lose it. They wanted to have a child. The dream is rapidly fading into the harsh reality of the times. Outside, he lights a cigarette with trembling hands. I watch him walk slowly to his car and sit in it for a long time before driving off into an unknown future. I suspect he is learning about tears.

I meet Jim, a salesman, and we go for coffee. We talk. He and his wife are in their early fifties. He is not a stranger to hard times. His manner and the deep angular lines etched into his face show it. He has been here before, and he is tired, maybe too tired to pick up the pieces and start over again. They had hoped to buy a small place of their own in a few more years. They have been caught in the renter's trap for most of their lives, and they want to get out. Now their hopes are smashed against the sharp and jagged edge of the economy. We part. It is an awkward moment. We don't know what to say to each other.

I talk to Leo, a carpenter. He is married and has a three year old daughter. He is scared, damned scared, and he is beginning to break apart. I suggest tree planting, but a back injury from childhood rules out that option. I mention welfare, and he tells me to forget it. Under current rules he can receive some emergency assistance once a year, he says, and medicine for the child. And things are going

to get tougher. He speaks of people who have been divorced so that mother and child could survive. It is a frightening possibility; it may become his reality.

The morning is over, and I walk back to my car reflecting on the past week's news. They talked about the "trickle down theory," budget deficits, more billions for defense and fewer millions for social welfare programs. They projected a magic revitalization of the private housing market and ate dinner from thousand dollar place settings. They warn of the foreign threat, and tell me that under current fiscal policy, in ten years everything will be just fine. I am reminded of Marie Antoinette, circa 1792: "Let them eat bullets!"

I cannot relate to any of it. I can only relate to tomorrow, and maybe a week or two down the line. I relate to the loss of medical insurance and an immediate need for food. I relate to an electrical "discontinuance of service" threat, which I have carefully hidden away in a drawer. I relate to fear, uncertainty, disillusionment and a growing knot in my belly. I am cold, and I am scared.

Michael Ireland lives in Eugene, where he worked as an electrical systems designer before he was laid off. He is a forty-two year old Navy veteran, is married and has grown children. "On Theories Trickled Down" has been reprinted from Northwest Magazine.



TIME OF SPAWNING SALMON AT THE HEADS OF CREEKS (NEZ PERCE)

SEPTEMBER

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

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Café de la Mer
Cannon Beach



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NOT OUR DELICIOUS SEAFOOD
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Dinner: 6-10 Thurs-Sun