RANDY JONES

SUMMER GOLDRUSH

The Silly Season is in full avarice. Cash registers from coast to coast and amusement parks inbetween are playing America's song. Our Oregon and Washington beach towns are emporiums of prosperity, their streets and sands swarming with an annual infestation of sun and fun hungry protoplasm.

Everybody wants a cut of the tourist buck. Tourism attempts to fill the void left by depleted natural resources whose exploitation built and sustained the local coastal culture until the forests were cut down and the great fish runs decimated by the impetuous greed of white settlers and their descendants. A magnificent land that had thrived for millennia was ravaged in a century.

Now sultans of fun replace loggers and fisherpeople. They build shopping malls, condominiums, bigger and glitzier motels, restaurants and bars that remove the remaining trees and block ocean views. Cannon Beach, which in an earlier era resisted opportunities to be a second Carmel, has acquiesced and booms like a goldstrike town. Seaside mixed its sand with water and remade its graceful downtown into a cement mall. Astoria hustles its failed history and carpenter gothic houses to draw tourists from the beach towns.

Complaints about tourism are usually whines about discourtesies, inconveniences and crowds of noisy, fussy impatient strangers. But sometimes criticisms are registered about the sort of environment that is being imposed upon a previously neglected string of coastal towns and the ambivalence of residents between tourist revenues and environmental quality. The current practices of coastal entrepreneurs are a local symptom of a national malady: that money is all that counts and anything in the way of making a buck deserves to be deep-sixed.

Tourism has a habit of destroying what it seeks, and amidst the commercial glitter and singing cash registers the real gold is slipping out of our hands. Connie Rose Anderson, who used to live in Cannon Beach and in 1980 wrote an article for the *Times Eagle*, 'A Short History of Seaside', perceived clearly the changes tourism has wrought:

"Somewhere behind the pavement, the aluminum-framed, junk filled windows, the pinball machines and snowcone litter lurks the ghost of a pretty little beach town. A town that welcomed progress as a friend, resisted not at all, and in the short span of a man's lifetime, died under its feet with little more than a whimper. Seaside, whatever it is today, is not a pretty little town, either in physical appearance or character.

"The Oregon coast wears on its shores a string of such pretty little towns.... Cannon Beach, Manzanita, Nehalem. All today facing the same forces and models of thinking which have transformed so many of Oregon's coastal gems into a string of tasteless clunkers.

"Like Godzilla in a greenhouse, the tourist industry is a powerful force plowing through the small town's natural environment, leaving in its wake a trail of highway architecture, parking lots, condominiums, mobile home courts, souvenir junk outlets and the threat of legalized gambling. And the pretty little town loses more than just its physical beauty to the impersonal wasteland of the commercially controlled tourist trap. It loses its small town energy and character, which are the truest sources of its beauty and grace and which loss no cosmetic compromise by developers can remedy. Or replace."

~MICHAEL McCUSKER (JULY 1988)

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