

City Stuff
by Alison Pride

This is for anyone who's been wondering how I'm faring as a city dweller: Fine. Just dandy. Thanks for asking. I want you to know this because, if I can adjust to living in Portland, then anyone surely can.

The good news is this: I finally have a job and I have recovered my sense of humor. Up to now I've been blissfully unaware that the two were so intimately entwined, but this is just one of the lessons I've had forced on me since moving to Portland. For a frightening few weeks I had no sense of humor at all—even Dave Barry and my dog left me unamused. After arriving in Portland and allowing myself two weeks to be sick and then to unpack boxes, I decided to go forth from the safety of my house and get a job somewhere in my neighborhood. I liked the idea of walking or biking to work. Trouble was, nobody was hiring anywhere I wanted to work. So I turned to a more traditional method of job-hunting.

Every Sunday and Wednesday I searched the Help Wanted ads with a frantic devotion bordering on obsession. I even started eyeing the ads for banks, to prove to you just how desperate I'd become (and I mean no offense to those who work in banks—just not my cup of tea, you know).

Desperation is generally not a good position from which to operate. I emphatically wanted out of the restaurant business (and I mean no offense to my former bosses—I may still need you as references). I decided I wanted some kind of office work, anything at all, just to try something new.

So I did what any reasonable person with a shrinking checking account would've done and went downtown to the (Un) Employment Office, populated by people at least as desperate as I was, and filed for benefits. I thought I would buy myself some time. After standing in the requisite lines and filling out the requisite forms, I was even more resolved to find a job ASAP. Really, though, I have never met such helpful and courteous people as those working at the Employment Office. For instance, they still know how to have a good laugh and don't mind sharing it. During my orientation, one woman relayed a very humorous story about how the main computer one day up and decided to take a vacation (this, of course, raises a very interesting question—where do computers go on vacation?) and in two hours, 12,000 calls from all over the state of Oregon were lost (where was never explained, although some timid soul did ask). Never fear, they were eventually retrieved (when, I presume, the computer decided to quit messing around). But this was not at all reassuring to those of us, like myself at the time, who were sadly Technologically Disadvantaged.

After my little adventure at the Employment Office, and with my first check for \$66 stashed in the bank (I never should have taken those four months off last year), I went looking for a job as a receptionist.

But it's difficult (ha ha, so nice to have a sense of humor again) to get a job in an office, if you want to do anything more challenging than use the copy machine, when you have no computer skills and are a technophobe. So I did what any reasonable person would've done and borrowed \$200 to take a class in WordPerfect 5.1. For five mornings, just like a regular work week, I had a respectable excuse to get out of bed in the mornings, dress in reasonably presentable clothes (taxing my wardrobe to the outer limits), and stare intently at a computer screen for four hours. I actually surprised myself by enjoying it. At the end of the week, I possessed the computer proficiency of any six-year-old with a PC (and if you don't know what this stands for, you really are hopelessly hopeless). This is not a reflection on the course or my instructor (or my high school typing teacher), but it takes a lot longer to climb the mountain when you start at sea level (pun intended I'm sure) than it does if you get plunked down at the base camp. So, reinforced by my newly acquired computer skills and sure that anyone could immediately spot what a valuable addition I'd make to any office, I set out to find a job.

Many cover letters and resumes later, and after a humiliating visit to a temporary agency (after my typing test, they asked me if I'd ever considered a little light industrial assembly line work), I was favorably rethinking restaurants. And like a small miracle (just when I needed one), a restaurant I liked advertised for a waitperson and, being no fool, I decided to apply for something I actually knew how to do.

So once again I joined the ranks of the gainfully employed. I don't know when I'll get to use my WordPerfect expertise (I don't know any six-year-olds), except to play around after hours at Kinko's (it really is fun, they're open 24 hours), but I'm not going to lose sleep over it.

And finally, should you ever find yourself in Portland and/or without a job, I'd like to share with you the job hunting tips I found most helpful.

1) If all possible, look for a job while you have a job. The difference is all attitude, the good versus the desperate. Before I had a job, I envisioned myself prostrate

ignominiously at the feet of whoever would finally hire me, blubbering my eternal gratitude and loyalty. After I had a job, I went on two more interviews just for kicks. The transformation was remarkable. I had the power to decide I wasn't interested and walk away (and that was salve indeed for the old, battered ego). I was much more relaxed and articulate during the interviews. Not once did the embarrassing whine of panic enter my voice.

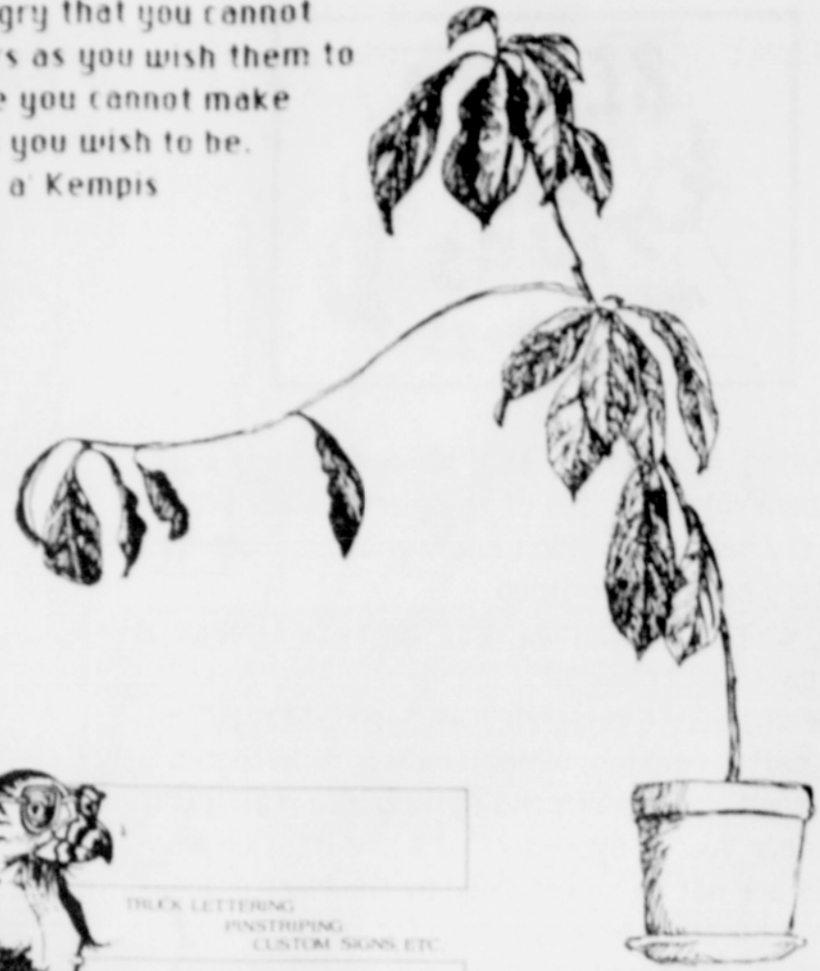
2) Realize you are not alone. This should seem obvious to all but the totally uninitiated, especially when you show up for a job and there are already 20 other eager people in the room applying for the same job (and you recognize a least half of them). One good friend told me it took him six months to find a job and that he mailed out hundreds of resumes. I think he was trying to be helpful. The point is, you have to understand that there are a lot of people out of work right now. There's no shame in it—it's just, unfortunately, sometimes the way it is. If you need a support group, there is a handy, inexpensive one that meets daily at the Employment Office.

3) Use absolutely every available resource. Not just the paper. Shamelessly use your friends. I did, and as a result I may actually have an opportunity to write for my supper. I don't want to say anything more about it right now because I still believe jinxes (but thanks, Uncle Mike).

One more thing. If you ever come to Portland and you want a good place to eat breakfast or lunch, come visit me at the Cadillac Cafe on Northeast Broadway. I think I'm going to like it there just fine.

Don't be angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, because you cannot make yourself as you wish to be.

Thomas a Kempis



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I don't believe in collective guilt, but I do believe in collective responsibility. Audrey Hepburn

Coffee Cabana

"KNOWLEDGE IS POWER..."
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The service we render others is really the rent we pay for our room on earth. Wilfred Grenfell

We are delighted to welcome Rick Rubin to our pages this month. (Even though the story ran in the W.W. ten years ago, it still holds true.)

REX AMOS is worried, as we shake our creaking old bones out of bed in his one-room beach cabin. He has promised that we will harvest great bags of succulent razor clams, although it's a terrible year for clams. He has made this dangerous boast on account of having a resident guru of clam digging a couple of houses up the street from his cabin. Amos is a great one for gurus: he has one to teach him how to make art, and he used to have another for log-cabin building and trout fishing. However, his clam-digging guru was not at home last night, and, peering worriedly through a garage window, Amos discovers that the man's car is still not there this morning. Amos must himself play guru.

I am sanguine. The morning is cloudless, and I have no expectation of catching any clams in the first place. My real concern is that my editor wants more point to my slices of Oregon life. Mere good times are not enough. My editor has learned that the ecology of Oregon is under attack by forces in and out of nature. He wants my stories to tell of these attacks, and galvanize the citizenry to repel them.

Amos and I gulp scalding coffee, and throw our weapons—clam guns of the latest PCV pipe design and cut-up plastic bleach bottles—into the car. We bundle up in unnecessarily warm clothes against the dawn, and head north across Tillamook Head toward Gearhart. The sky is breaking saffron and chartreuse behind the scraggly Coast Range.

We park beside the road that fronts Gearhart, a narrow, gravel non-thoroughfare lined with the weathered-shingle houses of old money, and walk toward the beach across the grassy dunes. This new area of dunes has appeared since South Jetty was built, up at the mouth of the Columbia River; from the standpoint of Gearhart landowners, it is one of the problems that afflict our state.

The razor clam is a curious beast. Like juveniles of many another species, young razor clams enjoy a period of restless wandering, then sink to the bottom and never move again. The beds in which the razor clams perform this fall from grace extend from depths of 24 feet up almost to dry sand. From the moment it sinks to the bottom, the clam is at risk to the clam digger, but only those in the intertidal zone are likely to find their way into a human stomach. Mankind may decimate the clam

beds out to lowest low tide, and the most skilled clam diggers can even dig up clams in a foot or two of water, spotting the telltale sign as they stand knee-deep in surf. Beyond that, though, the beds are safe from humans.

We continue down the path and turn south, toward Little Beach, where the Neahcixie and Necanicum rivers debouch into the mother Pacific, providing a handy boundary between tawdry Seaside and pristine Gearhart. Little Beach, by virtue of being some hundreds of yards from the nearest habitation, is generally a misty, calm and exceedingly beautiful spot, a charming miniature of Oregon estuaries, rich with sea and bird life, changing constantly and yet always the same.

We reach the hard-packed sand of the intertidal zone at last, and Amos sets up as teacher, to pass his wisdom of clam digging on to me. The Tao of clam digging, according to *Rishi Rex*, is simple. Face the sea, he tells me, spot a dimple in the sand, encircle it with the business end of your white plastic tube with handles, the so-called clam gun, slant your weapon slightly seaward, and push. The clam, on hearing you above, jerks back down a foot or so into the sand, but your gun is quick, and goes down two feet. The clam, being unable to move sideways once it has found its lifelong home, is hostage to the gunner's attack.

This is the clam's Tao (a word impossible to pin down but generally meaning the way or path): to move up and down but never sideways, to strain food, reproduce, grow large, perhaps be caught, and finally to expire. The clam digger's Tao, on the other hand, is shimmering black beach reflecting sunrise approaching from the east in colors of cerise and magenta, and hordes of other clam diggers scurrying up and down the beach, punching holes by gun or shovel in the sand at the edge of the Pacific Ocean, just now at a minus-1.5-foot tide.

We walk the beach in search of dimples. The clam retreats, when frightened, and that is its undoing, for this retreat creates the tiny, inverted nipple in the sand. Should the clam be a brave one and not frighten easily enough, the hunter stamps his petulant foot in mock rage against the hard-packed wet sand. Then even the bravest clam will certainly burrow, and leave its trace, and forthwith be captured. That Tao is shared by clam and clam digger alike—indeed, it is where their universes intersect, to the detriment of the clam.

Clam digging was one of the outdoor activities my father learned during his 20 years in Oregon. Clam digging and smelt fishing and driving out to Multnomah Falls. It takes a while to learn the pleasures of the country, and he wasn't the outdoor type.

Lucky the Oregonian whose ancestors arrived early in the Promised Land! Lucky, but not necessarily thereby happy. There have been many waves of ancestors. First, perhaps, the Salish-speaking Tillamook Indians. Some time later, the Chinookan-speaking Indians. The Clatsop-Chinook probably displaced Salish speakers from the mouth of the Columbia, and used to winter over not far from where Amos and I now search for dimples. In the autumn of the year, the Clatsop would pull back from their fishing villages along the southern mouth of the Columbia to Neahcixie village, where they spent the winter in singing, dancing, reciting myths, and other sacred activities, a two-month-long art festival.

Those early Oregonians have long since disappeared, their ancestral beds despoiled by newcomers who pounded objects more deadly than clam guns. They were harvested by smallpox, measles, syphilis or malaria, brought into paradise by the "Tlohonnips" as the Chinooks first called them, meaning "Those who float ashore." Indeed, it was a few miles north on this very beach that the first of the *Tlohonnips* appeared: two bear-like creatures riding a whale with trees growing from its back, who dismounted to beg water and cook what sounds like popcorn, and were forthwith enslaved but later freed. Thus did Europeans enter the Tao of the Chinooks, a foreshadowing of what was to come—though the warning did no good.

First Amos, then I, bag one razor clam and soon another—small ones, to be sure, but no less tasty for that. We pop them into the cut-open clorex bottles we have slung from our belts, and continue the search with optimistic vigor. Up and down

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