

**Tag Sales & The Birds of Spring**

commentary by George W. Earley

Many are the signs of spring. For the sports fan it is the end of basketball and hockey and the onset of baseball fever. Fitness buffs leave indoor gyms and take to roads and jogging tracks, while college students jet off to Florida.

But for the average homeowner, spring means other things. Winter equipment must be cleaned and stored, while lawn mowers and garden tools are primed, polished and set in ordered rows awaiting the growth of grass.

Then come the birds from the south, seeking out last year's nests. Those which have survived winter's storms are battered and in need of repair, a fact that does not seem to bother their cheeping tenants. In short order they divide the debris into reuseables and discardable and then bring in newer material -- often scrounged from the discards of other nests.

Meanwhile, down on the ground in human habitats, a similar process is under way, as the ancient rite of spring shares time with a newer event -- the tag sale.

Tag sale habits may not stop to think of it, but this practice is a recent human variant of the age-old avian one of feathering ones nest with someone else's discards.

Watchers of the parade of possessions from old homes to newer ones cannot help but notice the truth of the old adage: "One man's trash is another's treasure."

For better or worse, the flow of dollars from these tag sales appears to be overlooked by our revenue-hungry bureaucrats. Confess -- who among us have reported our tag sale profits on April 15th?

But, taxes aside, our bureaucrats should be reminded of a positive aspect to this rite of spring -- recycling. Just think how much more crowded our overworked landfills would be were it not for tag sales.

I'll bet Uncle Harry's moose head has graced a dozen homes since he shot it 40 years ago. Outgrown bikes, trikes, and baby buggies get a second, third, or even fourth lease on life as seasons pass and riders go on to newer, bigger wheels.

Clothing too, Long-sleeve shirts become short-sleeve ones. Once-dressy gloves move to the garden, while tired towels turn into wash cloths or polishing rags before being sent to the tool shed.

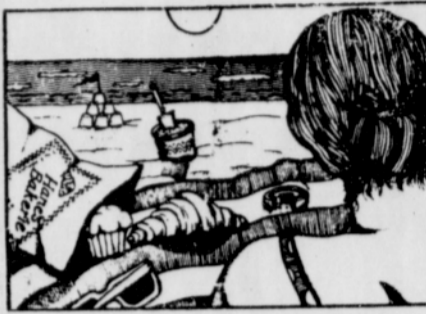
By the time our perambulating household discard makes its final migration to those crumpled curbside cans, there is far less of it than when the cycle began years before.

So thank the busy birds for their example and sing a happy song as you tackle your spring cleaning and set up you tag sale tables in the yard.


George W. Earley observes birds and other beings from his home on one of Mount Hood's ancient glacial moraines.

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**FROM THE LOWER LEFT CORNER**

**A Pot For Every Chicken**  
Victoria Stoppello

I heard recently that a hotel with shared baths has a difficult time surviving in America, that is, surviving economically. Apparently Americans, unlike Europeans, expect, even demand, a private bath with their room, and therefore old hotels are forced to do difficult and expensive remodels in order to create private baths with each and every room. So much for character or charm, we just want more plumbing!

I've traveled outside the States and often on the cheap, so that is an attitude I don't totally understand. Somehow we Americans got the idea that we had to have our very own facility to poo and pee or we are somehow deprived or unsafe. Maybe this comes from our pioneering past when a trip to the necessarily shared outhouse might have included an encounter of the worst kind: grizzly bears, rightfully irritated natives, or worse.

Maybe it was because our culture has had such a high tolerance for alcohol consumption, and that combined with a manly man attitude, you never knew what you'd find on the seat.

Maybe it's our preoccupation with science and over interest in germs, disease transmission, and a belief that sexually transmitted diseases can be passed on toilet seats.

Maybe we've read too much Freud, and we have the notion that if someone else uses the same toilet, sink and shower, they'll pick up our scent, know something about us that our own conscious mind refuses to acknowledge.

Maybe it's because late 19th and early 20th century child rearing practices put an emphasis on regularity and having to share the facility during potty training might have been just too disruptive to the potty training regimen.

My theory, though, is that it's due to advertising. One car became not enough, nor is one TV, or even one house for a lot of people, so certainly one bathroom, at only four or \$5,000 a whack, certainly couldn't be enough in an American home. Therefore, since when we travel we expect to be treated even better than at home, if at home we have one full bathroom for every two or three bedrooms, we certainly expect a better bath to bed ratio on the road. Plus we can afford it, right?

We're the country of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness -- so let's pursue bathrooms. After all, in some large families a mere 40 years ago, the only place a person could get enough peace and quiet to read was, you guessed it, the john. Maybe that's why there's been a proliferation of bathrooms. As more of the population attain college educations, and with TVs in almost every room, the readers among us need a small, warm place to sit and do our studies.

How things could deteriorate, or is it ameliorate, in only a century, from the shared outhouse, even to the point of a two-holer, to a bathroom every place you turn, is one of the truly significant phenomena of the industrialized age. Like so many things American, our collective attitude is, you got it, so flaunt it. While some folks struggle with sleeping in doorways and sneaking into gas station restrooms to sponge bathe and wash their hair, others have a plethora of bathrooms all to themselves.

My dad's wife didn't like visiting me in Portland because our four-bedroom, un-retrofitted Queen Anne Victorian house had only one bath. It was a split bath at that, with a true w.c. and a separate room with a large clawfoot tub and marble sink for bathing. In fact, when traveling, this lady refused to stay in a room unless it had not only a private bath, but also two sinks. Maybe my dad was messier than I thought, but I never noticed him leaving the cap off the toothpaste, and he certainly didn't have enough hair to sully the sink.


Oh well -- those historic hotels on the East Coast, loaded with charm, real wood furniture and hand plastered walls, some of their proprietors are justly adamant about keeping things just as they are. They still think they have a market niche that will never be overtaken by the Hojos, Shilos, and other glossy cookie-cutter hostleries that show up at almost every freeway off-ramp and are now spreading to the hinterlands. Those old places are counting on customers like me, who remember the times when sharing a bathroom was just an unremarkable fact of life.

Victoria Stoppello is a writer living in Ilwaco, at the lower left corner of Washington State.

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