



The Professor would like to present a couple of bits of doggerel as prefatory material for his screed this month:

"Rory, get your dory.
There's menhaden in the bay!"

Rory got his dory,
But the fish had gone away.

The clams might show,
But you won't know,
If you don't go.

Sadly, both clams and menhaden appear to have vanished in many parts of our country. Unlike schools of migratory fish, our regional bivalves, the northwest razor clams, move only a scant distance in their short lifetimes. They scuffle up to the surface of sand bars to feed on plankton, then kick back down a few feet into their sandy beds. Tagged clams have been found to travel only 50 feet or so laterally in a year.

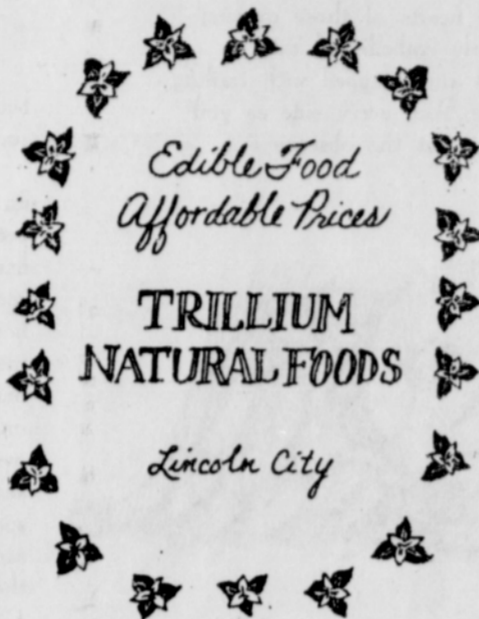
The little rascals, toothsome and tender as they are, take a terrible beating from armies of shore side diggers. They've always reminded me of Schmoos, those small, vulnerable little mushroom-like entities that appeared in early Al Capp cartoon strips. Schmoos, like razor clams, were succulent and helpless. They practically begged for predation.

For decades the harvest remained bountiful and seemingly boundless here. Numbers started to fall off on local beaches by the 70's. People blamed El Nino, the eruption of Mt. St. Helens ("lots of pumice on the offshore bars. The clam spat can't establish itself properly"), and shifting currents from the South Jetty of the Columbia River. Forget that clams were once extracted by bulldozers from local beaches, that cars skimmed across clam beds at low tides, and that armies of diggers yanked, maimed, and pillaged with abandonment for most of the 20th Century. Clamming on northern Oregon beaches for the last two decades could be optimistically described as "spotty." By the 90's, the average person's daily catch included a preponderance of yearling clams about the size of an extra small oyster removed from the shell. Oregon's bag limit remained 24 clams. The season ran from September to July, digging permissible on any low tide series. Commercial diggers dug in the same areas as sports diggers; less than ethical commercial harvesters hauled sacks home to stock the freezer.

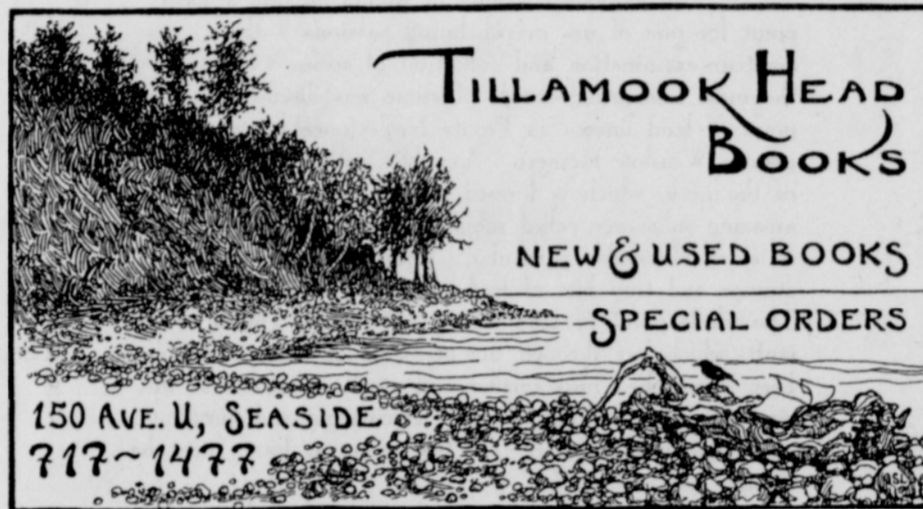
On November 11th of this year we travelled to the southern Washington beaches for their short opening. Conditions were sweet: gentle surf and mild weather. In 10 minutes each of us dug our limit of 15 clams, each of them the size of a basketball sneaker. Other clam diggers we encountered evidenced the same success.

One needn't be a Rhodes Scholar to see the wisdom of Washington's radically curtailed seasons, strict bag limits, and stringent enforcement.

I feel obligated to nudge the State of Oregon gently out of sheer embarrassment. When will our Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife stand in and make some tough decisions? Thirty miles away in the State of Washington the clam fishery is thriving. Here in Oregon the creatures seem destined to go the way of the dodo and the abalone. Commencing changes tomorrow may be too late, but to do nothing is unthinkable.



The Republican Party either corrupts its liberals or it expels them.
Harry S. Truman



An autobiography usually reveals nothing bad about its writer except his memory.

Franklin P. Jones

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From The Lower Left Corner
Victoria Stoppello

All I want for Christmas is...

The morning of winter solstice arrived with fresh snow on the ground. My husband asked, "Why do people get so excited whenever it snows?" My intuition replied, "Because it's a transformation." It's the time of year we look for magic.

My thoughts turned to Christmas. A while back I heard a radio host reading children's letters to Santa. One writer wanted a bunch of Barbies and a computer. I thought back to my own past Christmas wishes; I wanted a horse at six, requested a miniature refrigerator and range when I was seven, and a bicycle at nine. You'd think I wanted a car at 16, but all I wanted then was to get out of Vernonia!

As an adult, I've been asked what I'd like for Christmas and a few years ago, my wish for a new bathroom sink was fulfilled. This year I've been thinking about Christmas wishes and have come up with a few: I'd like to stop worrying as much as I do. I wish that those I know who are struggling with cancer would fully recover. I wish my older relatives would find peace of mind as they approach the end of life. I wish we'd all get along a little better—a retreated version of "peace on earth" that applies to the where I live just as well as to the Middle East.

But most of all, I wish the salmon would return. My feelings about this aren't totally rational. I don't fish and I know I can live without eating salmon, but it goes deeper than the material fact of fish coming and going in the rivers. If the salmon runs returned, then I'd know things are going to be all right.

I used to take salmon for granted. We caught them, smoked them, canned them, cooked them, ate them. Carved them, painted them, counted them, waited for them. And now we wait for them some more and the counts aren't very good. I feel myself growing tense, wondering if their numbers are so depressed that they might not make it back. A combination of events could deliver the fatal blow, not just to one run, but to many. How far down can we push them and still have them bounce back? What are we waiting for? Are we really willing to take the chance of losing them forever, like the passenger pigeon, just plain gone, no more, none, not any?

I feel a frightened twitch in my gut about this. Salmon are not just a symbol, not just an artifact from another era. They are an indicator of our own chances. If wild salmon can't make it in this land of the salmon and cedar people, this environment to which they are wonderfully adapted, what are our chances? Do we really believe that we can live beyond nature, beyond the restraints of clean water, clean air washed by forests? Can we live with polluted streams, a landscape of pavement and buildings only? Can you eat electricity?

The other night I asked a few friends the rhetorical question, "How many people are thinking they want the salmon to return?" and the other three said in unison, "Everyone does." But the realist in the group said, "That's not the issue. The problem is everyone wants someone else to make the change, no one wants to stop building, reduce their electricity, stop dredging, stop clearcutting, get the cows out of the streams, stop fishing. We all point our fingers at someone else to change their behavior so the salmon can come back."

That's both a realistic response and a disheartening one. My little efforts are so insignificant compared to the Corps of Engineers blasting and dredging three feet out of a hundred miles of Columbia River. My little house's energy conservation is only a drop saved from the millions of megawatts that get swooshed through the Columbia River's dams. My little voice asking to protect wetlands and streams within the town of Ilwaco is a whisper compared with the boom of "can't stop progress" and "it'll be good for economic development."

But I've got to start somewhere in order to have any peace of mind. I can suggest, I can wish, I can imagine. As the song goes, "you may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. And maybe someday you will join us..."
Victoria Stoppello is a writer living in Ilwaco at the lower left corner of Washington state.

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