

The Last Goodbye

By Jerry Harris



Sagittarians can never stay in one place too long. I remember as a young man I fled the East Coast to San Francisco and my mother asked, "Where next – Europe?" I did end up in Sweden. Mothers are always right. I lived in Europe for 20 years before I returned to the U.S., and eventually to Eugene four years ago.

Well, young at heart and not wanting to be an old Eugene hippie, I am leaving again. This is the last goodbye, but who knows, I might come back one day. Eugene is like Mecca; everyone must return.

Since I arrived here I have always felt like one of those characters from an old Hollywood Western movie. The stranger – the guy in black arrives in town, but this time he is a real black dude. Lacking a horse, he hitches his mind to the community. He walks through many establishments. In one bar they ask, "Who's the stranger, Sally?"

"I don't know Slim. He just popped out of nowhere." Nowhere! Haven't black people been in America for more than 450 years? One wouldn't think this in Eugene. Here, I have felt like a brother from another planet, and of course I am. In Europe I am just an American, but one who doesn't wear an Hawaiian shirt while walking down the Boulevard St. Germain in Paris looking for a McDonalds.

Blacks are not a happy lot here. This can be seen by the past and recent racial profiling charges against the Eugene police. One professional woman I knew recently left for California. "I don't want to die here," she said. African-Americans have a kind of shadowy presence in Eugene, if one can call it a presence at all. They are peripheral inhabitants of a white ghetto. I don't think that Eugene was designed with black people in mind. In my all-white building I am still looked upon with suspicion. One old lady blocks my mail box upon my approach and tells me, "Go back to Africa." Now, I don't know why I would be going back to Africa, but that is her problem, and not mine.

Getting back to my mother, she used to say, "You're contrary." Now, as a kid, I didn't know what she meant, but of course I know now. If she were alive today, she would just say that her son is a happy anarchist, something he inherited from his father. Bad disease or something. Thanks Mom, and Dad too.

I don't like last goodbyes. They don't exist. Memories stick. I remember the first time I came here and I was kicked out of a well-known East 13th Avenue bar for kissing a white girl. Well, I didn't kiss her, but she executed her constitutional rights by embracing me, and we both were routed out. "Do you want to write about it?" asked an editor at *The Register-Guard*. "Sure," I said, because I only thought these things happened in Mississippi.

Have I met some good people here? You bet your sweet bottom I have. I've had a great editors at *Eugene Weekly* and many creative artist friends. There's Dave who owns the Dairy Queen. There is officer Ellis of the Eugene Police Department, and a regular fixture in the campus area, and another policewoman, officer Curry, who helped me get rid of a stalker. There is my friend and great English teacher John Williams at LCC. I've had laughs with Ken the Bar-B-Q-King, Bahati Ansari, and Tina Rinaldi at the Jacobs gallery. There is Tim the Hot Dog Man at the entrance to the UO who is a world traveler, and there's a wino with whom I have had many intellectual conversations. Sweet guy, just down on his luck.

I certainly wouldn't let a few cowpokes at the Horsehead bar make me feel bad about Eugene. If all of Eugene was like the Horsehead bar, brother this town would really be in Shitsville. Actually I don't feel bad about Eugene at all.

I guess that I just don't fit into small towns. I remember once I moved to a small university town in Sweden. It was the University Of Lund in the south across the river from Copenhagen. I was going through a crisis in my marriage, and I told my wife that I would go there and just become anonymous. She laughed and said, "You'll never be anonymous anywhere, my friend." Well, that's my fate – Eugene, Portland, and the world. They say never say never, so I will never say that I will not come back to Eugene, if it is only for a visit. Ciao to everyone.

Jerry Harris in an internationally known sculptor, writer, and new immigrant to Portland.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Party propaganda to define you, well — you have lost yourself. You have allowed others to define your mindset. Widen your understanding before we sink our great country. Because we cannot survive fractionalized.

*Roberts Greenaway
Eatonville, Wash.
(regular visitor to Oregon)*

MONEY UNION

Some people claim that unions are dead. Not so. What else is the Chamber of Commerce, but a union for the well-heeled?

*Bill Smee
Springfield*

HEART-BREAKER

Dear Christian children: Do you love Jesus? Does Jesus love you? Do you want to show Jesus how much you love Him, in a very powerful way? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, than all you need to do is carry out His most important wish, "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

Please do not break Jesus' heart. Please don't hate people because something about them is different from yourself. I am not talking about some of the hurtful things that some people do like killing and robbery. That is a whole other story. I am talking about differences, like people who have brown skin, or who are left-handed, or who are gay.

People who voted "yes on 36" are breaking Jesus' heart. Gay couples are the same as your parents in most ways. They work, play, laugh, cry, and sometimes argue about the bills. Some of them are Christians like you. Some raise children, some are doctors, teachers, police officers, and some are also unemployed.

If your parents voted "yes on 36" then they broke Jesus' heart. But you don't have to be like them. You can be your own person. Please don't break Jesus' heart.

*Amy Gaudia
Eugene*

FALSE PROPHETS

Since the White House is being run by fundamentalist evangelical Christians, I thought it might be a good idea to read some of the New Testament again to find out where we might be headed. In the first epistle of John are descriptions of the deceiver, the anti-Christ: "He who says 'I know Him,' but disobeys His commandments." (1 John 2:4) In Revelations, John describes the consequences of being deceived by the deceiver, "fire came down from heaven and consumed them" (Revelations 20:9).

If I were an evangelical Christian, I would be giving a good, questioning look at George W. Bush. As a matter of fact, the Apostle John suggests it (see below).

Shortly after Mr. Bush accepted Jesus Christ as his personal savior he was approached by members of a determined

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