

to revitalize its downtown, so it can be more like it was in the old days, before the shopping centers got built to the north, and the roads connecting the two parts of the city grew into a tangle of cloverleaves and overpasses where outsiders get lost.

In some ways the city expanding north of the river is more foreign to me than Springfield. From the evidence of lawn signs, it too is a red state — well, at least compared to College Hill. (Then again, maybe *everything's* a red state compared to College Hill!) In any case, like a lot of "gowns," I came to Eugene for the college town, not for the business environment, and I've been surprised by the pace of development. I don't *complain* about development to the north or west — the south side's no less sleepy, funky and old-fashioned for all that; but because development's a political issue, you can't really be neutral on the subject when elections roll around. It's always growth versus no-growth.

So, far from wondering why Eugene and Springfield don't *merge*, I'm walking along Deerhorn Road wondering how the two sides of Eugene have managed to *stay together!* I kind of wish the sleepy college town south of the river and the bustling development north of it could go their own ways. Let each side govern itself! My side could call itself South Eugene, or Old Eugene — or maybe Lesser Eugene.

Left to its own devices, Lesser Eugene would have its own college-town economy, anchored by its one major employer, the university, and by cottage industries providing coffee, pizza, organic vegetables, Tibetan prayer flags, bikes, books, computers and run-down apartments to tens of thousands of temporary residents. Students don't have much money to spend, but they need the basics, and because there are so many of them, they can keep a small economy percolating pretty well.

Mostly, Lesser Eugene would be a residential "bed-room community" — which must be why I keep calling it "sleepy." Its politics would be liberal. Taxes would be high, to pay for all the government services that liberals always want. Growth would stop; cutting trees would be a capital crime; time would flow backwards; the ridge-line would hold; no one would even *ask* about building anything new to the south or east, on Old Dillard, Spring, or Moon Mountain.

Meanwhile, the economy of Greater Eugene, to the north and west, would be anchored by the commercial zone stretching from Valley River and Country Club Road to Oakway and the Stadium (*yes, good news, Greater Eugene: you get the Ducks!*); but also by the industrial corridor on Route 99, and the office parks and box stores sprouting along Barger, Belt Line and Chad Drive farther north. And tell you what I'm

gonna do: As a bonus I'm tossing in everything west of Chambers, including 11th all the way out to Wal-Mart and the Hynix plant.

In short, the Lesser Eugene of my imagination would comprise exactly the area that the Little Caesar's Pizza across the street from me on 18th Avenue will deliver to: north to Whiteaker, west to Chambers, south to Crest and Fox Hollow, east to Spring Boulevard. When you think about it, it's a pretty diverse little town, a lot more than just a university neighborhood. The new *Atlas of Oregon* reveals that what I call Lesser Eugene was in fact the Eugene of 1950.

I'm not serious, I'm just nostalgic again for the America of my childhood. It happens when you walk through small towns.

Whew! By the time I get to Leaburg I've walked 30 miles, and I still have another 10 to go. Experienced hikers know that the human foot is only reliable for about 17 miles; after that, blisters and sore muscles begin to intrude on one's peace of mind. One meditates less and less on how one enters a town, on privacy and solitude, on the pleasures of back yards and alleys, on the comforting pace of Old Man River, on democracy, growth and no-growth, and on the America of 1950.

Under these conditions, Leaburg is a nice surprise. I enter it from the river, not the highway. I've passed it scores of times, never realizing that all these streets and houses were here. It would take time to look around, so I stick to my eastward vector and pretty soon I'm on the highway. But here I am, taking a walk purposely to *slow down*, to reconnect with human time, and still, I'm in *too much of a hurry* for something? I vow to be less single-minded on the next side road.

It's only a few miles before I get to test my word. Greenwood Drive provides a pleasant mile or so off the highway, and then my maps show an unnamed road running parallel to the highway, so I turn. Three carefully calculated turns later and I'm lost on a dirt road going nowhere. I can't even tell which way the highway is. How is that even possible? I walk back to the last crossroad and stand looking in the four directions. The maps are no help at all.

Make a wrong turn in your car and you lose a few minutes; when you're walking you can lose an hour — and at this point I'm paying for extra steps in pain! I regret my earlier vow. After a while I bump into the dam and power station near Waterboard Park.

At three miles an hour panic is ridiculous. You just keep rolling along, and your thoughts do too, though more fitfully after 10 hours. Maybe because I spent the

last half-hour wandering off the map, I find myself thinking about freedom.

"Freedom is on the march," the president says, referring to Iraq. What does he mean by "freedom," I wonder? I don't know what it means to him, but I know what it means to *me* right now — because out here, no matter how sore my legs and feet are, I remain exhilarated by the freedom of the open road, no less than an explorer immersed in the wilderness or a mountain climber on top of the world. Walt Whitman hit the right note in the opening lines of his *Song of the Open Road*:

*Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose. . .
O public road . . . I am not afraid to leave you, yet I love you,
You express me better than I can express myself . . .
From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits
and imaginary lines,
Going wherever I list, my own master total and absolute,
Listening to others, considering well what they say,
Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating,
Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself
of the holds that would hold me.*

Is that the freedom the president's talking about, the freedom to walk — to search, pause, listen, and gently contemplate — in whatever direction you choose? The freedom even to get lost sometimes? If so, I too wish it on the whole world. But I'm not thinking about the president. The closest I come to an actual political thought this late in the day is the realization that Freedom doesn't *march*. It *walks*. Only *soldiers* march. That's the sort of political commentary you get from a professor: Don't mix your metaphors.

The picturesque back roads of Lane County now feel like burning coals beneath my feet. To make it worse, for a few miles between Leaburg and Vida there's no choice but to walk on Route 126. I hold onto my hat as trucks roar by a few feet away. When you're Walt Whitman walking America, you take whatever the highway dishes up.

To top it off, as I approach the Goodpasture covered bridge there's a sudden downpour. I'm glad covered bridges are covered! When I come out the other end I can hardly believe my eyes: The sun has emerged, the way it does so often in Oregon at the end of the day, beaming horizontally over the landscape, and a rainbow fills the evening sky ahead of me.

Less than an hour later, as darkness falls at last, I knock on Russ's front door. It's seven o'clock, just when I told him I'd be there.

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