

Priceless Moments

Otters remind us of what's at stake.

Like many of my fellow Eugeneans, I was enchanted last week by news that river otters have returned to Amazon Creek in our West Eugene Wetlands. So last Sunday morning I searched for them in the creek's pre-dawn waters. It was a Halloween landscape: low, cold mists hovering above the prairie; great blue herons silently hunched in the dark creek; wet, heavy spider webs draped on tall grasses; Canada geese slipping in front of a fingernail-silver moon; red-winged blackbird sounds coming from unseen locations.

Two elements were missing from those pre-dawn wetlands, one of which (otters in the creek) I hope to soon see; the other (a four-lane freeway roaring above that creek) I hope I never see.

Last spring I was hiking four days down the Rogue River with my husband, son, and his fiancée. Across from Whiskey Creek, we saw an otter rolling around, scratching its back on boulders.

"It's getting pretty close to the edge," Josh noticed as the otter wriggled with abandon. Five seconds later, the otter tipped upside down and backwards into the Rogue. It immediately sprung out, cast one glance our way, and leapt back onto the rocks, seemingly trying to imply that the fall had been intended. To see an otter is to know delight.

Otters, like beaver and salmon, once were our ubiquitous river companions throughout Oregon. Despite their resiliency, however, we have insisted on damming, roading, straightening, heating, diverting and polluting their watery homes to the point they are now exceptions rather than the rule. But given even partial restoration of waterways like Amazon Creek, all three of these adaptable and sturdy animals return to offer their skills, endurance and beauty.

Imagine a piece of paper 8-1/2 by 11 inches. And then imagine one tiny corner, 1/3 inch by 1/3 inch. If the whole piece of paper represents wetlands prairie area that once existed in the Willamette Valley, the one-third square inch fragment represents what remains, primarily in west Eugene, Fir Butte, and Findley Wildlife Refuge near Corvallis.

It is in these prairie fragments that Fender's blue butterfly, the great copper butterfly, western pond turtle, and other wetlands species are pulling themselves back from the precipice of extinction. And it is in these wetlands that otter are reminding us that if we give them back a tiny portion of their home, they will reward us and our children for the rest of our lives with priceless moments.

West Eugene Parkway advocate Gary Wildish of Chambers Construction writes in a recent *Register-Guard* op-ed that Mayor Piercy is repeating "the tired argument that wetlands would be lost to the roadway, overlooking that fact that any affected wetlands would be offset by the creation of twice as many ... The restoration of wetlands and net gain in their number is what is important, and that's what the parkway plan would achieve."

Mr. Wildish either doesn't understand or won't admit two important things:

- The wetlands that would be affected by being bisected throughout their length by the noise, pollution, physical blockage, and visual degradation of the West Eugene Parkway is *the entire West Eugene Wetlands*, not just the acreage upon which the highway would directly squat. Mr. Wildish's solution for "affected" wetlands is like promising that if a city street is constructed down the middle of the UO football field, a patch of football turf twice the footprint of that street will be built somewhere else, say over by Albertson's market. The reality is that the street would destroy the football field as a functioning and enjoyable system, and creating a disconnected patch of turf wouldn't begin to offset that destruction.

- Secondly, neither Wildish nor anyone else yet knows how to "create" a fully functioning, biologically diverse wetlands. So far, people are able to make only childish imitations of wild, functioning wetlands.

What *is* a tired argument is that we have no ability to figure out any way to travel around this one tiny fragment of congressionally purchased, public wetlands and its amazing inhabitants.

If you are lucky enough to see the otters of Amazon Creek, tell them a lot of folks are working to prevent a highway from roaring over them.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

soda pop available on school property.

The amount of sugar consumed has tripled in the last two decades of moving away from traditional nutrient-dense foods. Sugar and vegetable oil are the real cause of diabetes and obesity. Check out the WestonAPrice.org website for truth in science. They have no corporate contributors and believe saturated fat is healthy.

Coconut oil boosts metabolism. Isolated soy protein present in most processed vegetarian foods slows metabolism and contributes to our already high-estrogen diets. This has been shown to contribute to childhood and adult cancers plus early onset of puberty. Read some science not bought and paid for by the soy industry or the edible seed oil lobby that has been hoodwinking the well-intentioned for decades with half-truths about their products.

The healthy lunches debate should be one of the creative ways to deal with the economic realities and maximizing locally grown foods in the schools. It would be wonderful to get some of that Willamette Valley grass-fed beef into the local schools, but I think economics dictates we start with local fruits and vegetables when they are in season. Framing the debate between omnivores and vegetarians misses the point.

*Tom Schneider
Eugene*

MIND IN A CAGE

Dear Sally Sheklow: I really do feel sorry for you. Not because you're of a confused gender; that's obviously not in your control. No sane person would create that kind of world for themselves. No, it's that you seem to have no life outside of your daily trials with your confused gender. You wear your sexual predicament on your sleeve, not as a badge of honor, but as a representation of your reason for existence.

You must have nightmares that you might wake up one day, and discover you're really not homosexual. What would your life have meant then? The irony is you probably believe it's liberating to drone on about living "out," "hets" and the like, when in reality you're mentally caged because of it.

*Bill Fredericks
Eugene*

UNSPEAKABLE

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison on Oct. 23 put a big hypocritical spin on the matter of lying while under oath to a grand jury. Speaking about the Fitzgerald investigation into the leak of classified information for personal revenge and political reasons, she stated: "I certainly hope that if there is going to be an indictment that says something happened, that it is an indictment on a crime and not some perjury technicality."

On Feb. 12, 1999, Hutchison spoke about

her vote to impeach then-president Bill Clinton for perjury, for lying under oath:

"The edifice of American jurisprudence rests on the foundation of the due process of law. The mortar in that foundation is the oath. The oath is how we defend ourselves against those who would subvert our system by breaking our laws. There are Americans in jail today because they violated that oath."

That kind of partisan, unethical, flopping behavior is one of the three root problems choking the life out of American politics today. Pressure from the main economic powers of a region or nation is another; the third is never mentioned in public — and it won't be mentioned here, either.

We the people can pull ourselves out of this muck we're stuck in, but we'll have to address those two unspeakable problems if we expect to get any help from our own government.

*Rob Lafferty
Blachly*

WRONG LABELS

Why are we still calling George Bush and his handlers conservatives or neo-cons? They are reactionaries, and it's time we recognized that and labeled them accordingly.

This is assuming of course that Bush has any convictions at all other than that he's President and deserves to be.

*Jim Estes
Deadwood*

INSPIRING VET

We all see them with their signs on the corner. A disabled veteran who needs help. I had to find the truth about the man behind the sign.

His name is Doc Hadley. He volunteered to go to Vietnam at 19 years of age. Doc felt it was his duty. I asked Doc about his experiences in Vietnam. He looked down and spoke three words: "It was hell." Doc tells me he is alive by the grace of God.

Doc is now 55 years old. He has severe heart disease and his legs are dying from lack of circulation. He has just moved off the streets and is living in a camp trailer. Doc says that President Bush has taken away VA medical benefits from the Vietnam Veterans; they are being thrown out of the VA hospitals and not being treated. This does not break Doc's spirit. He says he will never give up, that he will never stop loving people. He does life day to day.

Doc is up at 5:30 every morning. He cleans and landscapes the area where he "signs." He watches over the young lady who works at the coffee shop next to him. He loves music and collecting antiques.

As I look into Doc's eyes I see a man who has seen and been through the worst. Doc says he sees hatred directed at him all day. He just forgives and loves those who judge him. He

WHO YOU GONNA BLAME?

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