Kitty, Cats and Claws

Visions often face ponderous inertia.

In this morning's movie of the mind, Mayor Kitty is driving her D12-CAT at the corner of the butterfly parking garage, and in the background is a replay of former Mayor Ruth taking out the tank-trap fountain at Broadway and Willamette. These hard-hatted women are stepping up to reclaim a park block, to assist the Farmers' and Saturday Market and create a new downtown square. Behind them are Councilors Taylor, Bettman, Solomon and Ortiz driving giant-clawed backhoes, whose prehensile teeth are grinding down the place's parking past. The real Eugene Skinner, not the bronze shrimp on the log, launches a cheer up through the dust over his donation! But where are all the men?

They hover nearby with their fingers in the air, waiting for leadership. Aroused by the heavy machinery, they nevertheless still wear the debilitating fear of downtown open spaces on their faces. They feel that lingering malady of the downtown mall and hunker before the reality of the social service squeeze that continues to diminish the potential of our public life. They badly need a trip to Portland and a visit to Jamison Park in the Pearl — or any other city where they have been knocked down downtown, but have found a way to get back up again. LODO in downtown Denver comes to mind; 16th Avenue is a great street.

There are typically three visionary stages. In the first stage, the vision is personal and held close for private viewing. Its language is a bit uncivilized. Let loose, it is mostly thought ridiculous and annoying. It gets and takes its inevitable first pot-shots from the predictably pragmatic.

A shared vision that taps what Eudora Welty called, "a deep and running vein" begins to have a life of its own. In this second stage, many minds begin to grind away at what earlier seemed insuperable.

Finally the vision passes into the "Well, duh! phase," becomes the conventional wisdom, and in its own good time joins our everyday world.

The old S.P. train station in Springfield is a case in point. When I proposed in 1984 that it be moved to the town entrance at 2nd and South A Street, to be remodeled as Springfield's Chamber of Commerce and used as a tourist information center, the possibility faced a ponderous inertia to say the least. The *R-G* editorialized twice against the practicality of the project. But the possibility touched people in the right spot, and after several years of remarkable civic effort, it was done.

When I pointed out in 1994, as the city of Eugene's lead urban design consultant for the South Bank Study, that it made no long-term sense to have an EWEB maintenance facility and equipment storage yard on the city's principal downtown riverfront site, it was irritating and upsetting indeed. EWEB had just concluded a yearlong master planning process for their property, which concluded that everything was to stay together where it was. I had looked deeply into the future of the place and couldn't see it. Now, 12 years later we are only a year or two away from EWEB's move to their new site and the beginning of a new downtown riverfront.

Stage three takes time; visions have their own clock. It is inevitable that the habitat for the automobile on the north Park Block will be destroyed by imagination and common sense. Charlie Porter will one day look down (or up depending on you past dealings with him) on a restored Millrace, running up Ferry Street and through the new portal under the tracks to the riverfront. The proposed new stoplight at 8th and Mill will transform into a needed overpass. Well, duh!

The visionary's job pays poorly, of course — some would say about what it is worth. But you get to rise each day, sweep the precedential and pessimistic table clean, and imagine, at a minimum to keep your certification, "three impossible things before breakfast." You get to wear, if only for a moment, Leonardo's tattered coat. It helps, of course, to be on PERS.

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Letters TO THE EDITOR

FALSE DICHOTOMY

Many people in the African-American community today can trace their lineage to enslaved peoples, but not to the regions and/or tribes in Africa from where they originated. They were robbed of this connection to their roots by their captors and by the inhumane conditions of chattel slavery. They forged their common identity linked by this shared history.

"Whiteness" is a response to, a reaction against this. "White" is a term of separation, to distinguish one from "black" or "colored." "Whiteness" does not exist, but unfortunately hatred and racism do.

I am not "white," and I resent that term when I check it on diversity questionnaires. I am Irish, English, Scottish, French and German. I am a person of European descent residing in the Americas.

The title of the lead article of the May 18 *EW*, "Culture of Whiteness," feeds into the false dichotomy of white vs. black. I applaud the substance of the article that makes many valid points. The historical chronology reinforces the need for the UO to actively recruit peoples of diverse backgrounds to enrich the learning experience for all students, faculty, staff, and the broader Eugene community.

Keith Barger
Eugene

SISKIYOUS ABUSE

Southwest Oregon's Siskiyou Mountains are a unique and special place. For our future, we need the wild rivers and wild lands that make Oregon a great place to live, work and raise a family. We need today's leaders to make a stand so that future generations can see salmon running in the crystalline waters of the Illinois River.

Despite the claims of Sen. Wyden and Rep. DeFazio that they value the wildlands and wild waters of the Siskiyous, they have not made any efforts to protect the old growth trees in large blocks of wildlands affected by the Biscuit Fire. Next month, the Forest Service plans to sell the rights to log tens of thousands of mature and old growth trees from the flanks Illinois River.

These forests are in large blocks of wildlands that the Forest Service staff identified three decades ago as logical additions to our Wilderness system. While it takes an act of the entire Congress to designate Wilderness, it will also take a commitment of our delegation to stop their destruction.

Jeremy Hall
Eugene

WALKING WOUNDED BLUES

I used to hunt in Oregon; worked long hours, but it wasn't bad. I paid good money for that shotgun — but that was before I saw Baghdad.

I served in Frenchie's armor corps; it hurts so bad he's dead. They watch your every movement now — that's life or death in old Baghdad.

The power's out, and folks are hot, no jobs, and sewage streams in streets. Sweet little kids still smile and play — pray for peace in grieving Baghdad.

Baghdad, ancient Baghdad; as far from home as I can get. You're older than the Pharoahs — wiser than the oracles. There's things you haven't taught us yet.

Jihadists come from everywhere; they cross the borders, and they're bold. It's sad a man would give his life to blast a crater in the road.

There's schisms in the council; all could go in the can. I wish folks knew our sufferings — God bless you, Ms. Sheehan.

Colin Powell spoke up, Shinsheki's gone, the command chain's all unhinged. Won't someone stand to get us home if we're not in here to win?

Baghdad, ancient Baghdad; as far from home as I can get. You're older than the Pharoahs — wiser than the oracles. There's things you haven't taught us yet.

You're on patrol or in your bunk; you're never safe with mortar fire. Ambush ahead or