

Barbie was Right

Flagging Desire, Part III

I enrolled in traffic flagger certification training. But could I learn a new job? Did I have the ovaries for this dangerous work? Would I pass the test?

Doubts be damned, I drove to the training site. I'd dressed the part—Levis, lace-up boots, denim work shirt. I even deigned to wear a bra, lest the traffic I was learning to control be inadvertently diverted. (Wifey now calls that particular undergarment, despite its capacious cups, my *training bra*.)

I walked up the concrete driveway. Three middle-aged, rugged-faced men in safety vests leaned on an old pickup, talking and smoking – the good-ol'-boys club of traffic control. Could I hold my own working with these guys? I considered turning back, but to be a flagger I'd have to, er, woman up.

Inside the converted-garage classroom a beer-bellied instructor took my fee and nodded toward the seats. Traffic control trainers have no mandate to be chatty. Or even friendly.

Other flagger-hopefuls arrived –all guys. I chose an aisle seat and filled out my registration form (at least there was a box for *Female*.) The vested men from outside greeted the instructor with ye olde manly hand clasp and shoulder slap – experienced flaggers, in for their three-year recertification. Serious business.

I was the only woman, but women of power had preceded me. The instructor carefully referred to flaggers as “he OR SHE.” Thank you sisters!

I paid attention. Twenty feet between traffic cones. Warning signs in this order: “Road Work Ahead,” “Be Prepared to Stop,” “Flagger Ahead.” I learned the three –and only three –regulation hand signals to stop, slow, and redirect traffic (does not include middle-finger salute, even though the flagger I met last summer said she'd resorted to it.)

A whole section of the traffic control training addressed managing disgruntled motorists. Apparently not all traffic appreciates being controlled. *Especially by a dyke.*

A film explained the dangers of the job (many!), annual statistics of road crew accidents (too many!), and ways to protect ourselves (not very many). Scary, but no way I'd chicken out now.

Finally, the instructor handed out the test. A burly trainee across the aisle sighed, tapped his pencil against his clipboard, sighed louder. He was sweating it.

Who knew so many calculations would be involved in flagging? Like the original talking Barbie observed, “Math is hard!”

When it comes to protecting road crews and motorists – and yourself – Department of Transportation certified flaggers must work strictly by the book. I get that.

I double checked my answers, made sure I had at least my name and the date correct, and handed in my paper. Except for the sighing he-man pencil-tapper, I was the last trainee to finish.

Two piles of completed tests sat on the trainer's desk. He put mine face down on the left pile. Had I failed?

The instructor handed me a card. My rejection notice? No, it was my Temporary Flagger Certification. I'm in! Mr. Trainer cracked an approving smile. “Now get out there and get to work.”

That is the plan.

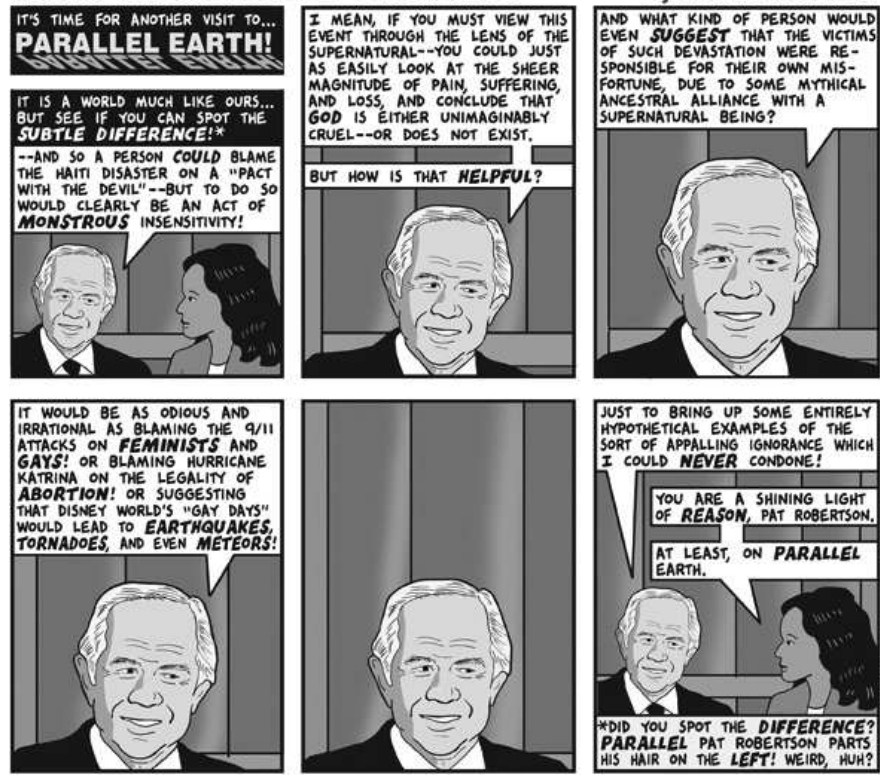
Award-winning writer Sally Sheklow's pursuit of happiness has been chronicled in Eugene Weekly since 1999.



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THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BUILDING A GLASS HOUSE

I have a few stones to throw at Phil Knight's glass cube for student athletes. Besides the fact that Knight is spending big money to defeat measures that will benefit the public good, the UO's own tour guide has already admitted seeing people walk into the building's glass walls. This means that the university is on notice of a hazardous condition, and unless they take steps to ameliorate the hazard (such as prominently placing colorful stickers at eye level throughout the structure) the next person who gets hurt walking into a glass wall will have a slam-dunk injury lawsuit against the UO.

Also, who's going to clean all that glass, and who's going to pay for all that extra cleaning? Is the UO going to spend more money doing that instead of paying professors what they're worth? And why can't athletes study in the library or the student center like everybody else? Does the UO deem athletes more worthy than scholars?

For all this aggravation, the UO gave up a perfectly good parking lot.

Ellen Singer
Eugene

RIVERFRONT REPAIR

I've dealt with the press many times over the years, but I've never been so misquoted or misrepresented. Apparently the advocacy journalism that *EW* engages in is not interested in fact or fair representation. Alan Pittman not only insulted ORI's integrity by printing an inflammatory remark made by opponents of the project but used the opponent's depiction of the ORI site that I told him was a misrepresentation of our plans.

ORI's site selection was not chosen because it had space for parking, as Pittman asserts; it was chosen because it is the best fit for us. ORI has a long standing, creative alternative transportation policy, and many ORI employees use alternative transportation, but we do need parking for some employees and research participants.

Our project will repair a site that has been closed to the public for more than 70 years and is surrounded by a chain-link, barbed-wire fence, a broken asphalt bike path, homeless camps and a transient population. Our development will create a safer connection between the university and downtown for the public.

Our commitment to the environment is unwavering and is reflected in our site plan. In addition, when the city is ready, we are willing and able to accommodate the Alder Street bike connection to the river within our site.

Check our website <http://wkly.ws/5a> for the factual information on our project.

Cynthia R. Guinn
Executive Director
Oregon Research Institute

YES ON MEASURES 66 and 67

Eugene-Springfield Solidarity Network/Jobs with Justice urges people to vote yes on Measures 66 and 67. With so many workers unemployed, governments need to do more to help the most vulnerable. Those who are out of work could have trouble finding new livelihoods, particularly if they are over 40 years old.

Many more workers could lose their jobs, meaning that some people who thought they would never need social services will need to turn to the government for help. Often, people run out of other options. Those who are doing better financially should be making a little more of a contribution to help those who need support.

Voting yes on Measures 66 and 67 is a way of supporting social justice. We need to look after each other instead of turning our backs on each other. Everyone deserves food, shelter, health care and the solicitude of the community when in need.

Governments can be the source of jobs — if Measures 66 and 67 do not pass, many people in the public sector will lose their jobs. Government funding can provide green jobs, for example in improved public transit.



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