

FOR THE BIRDS

While the theme for *EW*'s latest Outdoors Issue was welcome (May 18), I'm disappointed that, alone of the pursuits covered, birding was treated as a joke rather than the positive pastime so many find it to be.

Personally, I find that birding encompasses many of my passions: curiosity about the world, getting outdoors, learning, science, experiencing nature and even storytelling. I realize the tongue-in-cheek sensibility of Mr. Keefer's piece wasn't meant to denigrate birders, but it may discourage some from exploring the ornithology thicket.

If anyone would like a fun but serious introduction to birding — with a focus on

the Eugene area — I wrote a 'zine called *Chattering Madness* last year. The second issue is in the works, but I still have copies available. Email requests to mishapzine@yahoo.com.

Ryan Mishap
Eugene

ANTIQUATED BUREAUCRACY

Your recent article on abuse and neglect in Lane County's long-term care facilities ("A System of Neglect," May 4) raises several important issues.

One is the culture at Oregon's Department of Human Services (DHS). Their at-

titude seems to be to wait until abuse or neglect occurs, then issue a fine, which they know won't work, and finally order the facility to stop admitting new patients.

Shouldn't they be more pro-active — dealing with problems before they reach the neglect stage? If the problem is not enough nurses and caregivers, why isn't there a regulation requiring x number of caring professionals for every y number of patients, and then fines that are high enough so the owner will make changes.

Another problem is the antiquated bureaucratic system of DHS. You might have made clearer that Adult Protective Services is a part of DHS. And while APS often

does very essential work, it is sometimes used to avoid dealing with the real problems, e.g. overworked staff.

A culture that has lost sight of its mission and an antiquated bureaucratic system — they go hand in hand. DHS needs some big changes — the sooner, the better, for all our sakes.

John Kiely
Eugene

NEGLECTING THE ELDERLY

Thanks to Kelly Kenoyer for the impressive piece on Oregon's long-term care facilities (May 4). Bravo to Lee Bliven for his dedication.

NOTES FROM THE RIVERSIDE BY MARK HARRIS

Misappropriated Tropes

BACKLASH MASQUERADING AS BUDGET CUTS

When a trope or metaphor gets popularly misappropriated due to cultural transference, problems ensue.

Two examples often used in mainstream Western culture are "low man on the totem pole" and the "pawn in the game." Neither of these artifacts originally comes from Western civilization — that civilization in which cultural historical amnesia is a given norm and assimilation is a goal, thereby dooming those who buy into the concept to repeating preventable mistakes, like *déjà vu* all over again.

On the west coast of Turtle Island, the Tlingit-Haida Nation originated totem poles. Though their political influence at one time stretched down into what we call California, totem poles, like feathered headdresses and teepees, became a recursive meme meant to stand in for indigenous nations that never used them.

Obviously the being represented at the base of the pole, holding every one else up, has to be the physically strongest and, perhaps, the spiritually strongest, and certainly not the least powerful or significant in an artificial hierarchy. Similarly, the pawn in chess is the only piece on the board that, having reached its goal, can transform itself into the most powerful piece on the board.

As both totem poles and chess are originally artifacts, taken from indigenous communities of color, that have been adopted and changed by Caucasianization, we can expect these histories to be erased, and the emic (internal to the culture) symbolism to be misunderstood.

If I were low man on the white cultural totem pole, I might be looked upon with contempt by the ones riding on my back and shoulders as being a lower life form, when I'm actually supporting them.

Similarly, if I am an empowered pawn, capable of shape-shifting and exerting powers of transformation in myself and others, I can do that, even if visibly removed from the game. Just as successive exalted cyclops of Eugene Klan #3 have done by becoming businessmen, educators, politicians, administrators, etc.

In the quarter century I've worked at Lane Community College and the two years I've been employed at

the University of Oregon, I've been both forewarned and forearmed. Blessed enough to innovate and make change, only to see such innovations and changes get washed away by various forms of backlash rather than being built upon and protected.

African-American professionals who've worked and moved on from both workplaces have warned me: It's the belly of the beast, it's a great training ground for institutional racism, it's vicious, or viscous like mud or quicksand; it will eat you alive like quicksand made of acid.

Of course, I didn't enter into Eugene's "progressive paradise" with rainbow-tinted glasses, either. The upside is that here, if you're patient, you can get things done that might take longer in other places. But it might take you longer to implement what is a longstanding progressive standard elsewhere.

So, while I've participated in many innovative projects — at LCC, in the community and, finally, the past two years at the UO — to enhance the infrastructure, nothing can't be undone by backlash or budget cuts or backlash masquerading as budget cuts.

I like the irony quoted in the UO mission statement: the university "focuses on teaching and research excellence, with a focus on critical, logical thinking, clear communication, and ethical living." Budgets and expenditures reflect priorities.

As of this writing I've yet to be paid by the UO, working as an instructor teaching International Substance Use Treatment. I'm an addictions prevention, treatment and recovery practitioner. While not in 12-step recovery, I promote the "Addiction is Slavery" meme: I'm like Harriet Tubman or Morpheus. I teach addicted pawns caught in the matrix of addiction to become powerfully transformed, addiction Jedi knights and Warrior queens, rather than agents of the addicted system.

During basically the same time period, a drunken white assistant football coach got paid inside of a week for five days work, more money than I would've gotten paid if I worked for 10 years in the soon-to-be-canceled substance abuse prevention program.

I was forewarned to understand how the university

might value me if that value is measured in dollars and cents. I know how much money football makes, but how many brain-injured, addicted football players are there and who would help them?

If that value is measured in lives saved, improved and extended, and addiction reduced, the consensus might be that the value is priceless. Everything that has a beginning has an end. The end for the substance abuse prevention program is approaching. The problems won't be going away, and neither will many of us. We'll still be here, teaching pawns to transform, jumping barriers, and eliminating obstacles to empowerment.

Mark Harris is an instructor and substance abuse prevention coordinator at Lane Community College and the University of Oregon.

