

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## Water under the bridge



Compiled by Bob Duke

From the pages of Astoria's daily newspapers

### 10 years ago this week — 2005

The trail system promoted by Warrenton Police Chief Robert Maxfield is one of the best ideas anyone has floated on the North Coast. As described in Friday's front page article by Sandra Swain, this network of trails would capitalize on Warrenton's proximity to the Columbia River and other nature sights. It would also be a conceptual, if not direct link to Astoria's trail system and the fort-to-sea trail of the Fort Clatsop National Memorial.

Cities and town that make it easier for citizens to become pedestrians are healthier places to live. It sounds obvious, but many of America's newest suburbs and towns don't provide sidewalks or trails.

Warrenton can become much more than a home for big box stores. The trail system that Maxfield and his Warrenton Trails Association are promoting has that potential.

Something fishy was in the air Tuesday night at the Oregon State University Seafood Consumer Center.

Hundreds of samples of two dozen kinds of canned tuna sat in little containers, ready for sophisticated palates to select the best tasting albacore tuna from a micro-cannery.

"I've picked my favorite already," Larry Mason said, having only smelled the six different selections in front of him. Number 238, however, had a "light and refreshing" odor he reported.

The taste-off competition was part of the Community Seafood Initiative's First Annual Micro-Cannery Conference.

The snowpack in the Willamette River basin is alarmingly low for this time of year, researchers say, and the situation is not likely to improve any time soon as temperatures around the region hit record highs for January.

### 50 years ago — 1965

The Oregon Highway Department will bring a survey crew into Clatsop County within two weeks to survey the 10-mile Tongue Point to Svensen section of the Lower Columbia highway for relocation, state Rep. Holmstrom announced during a week-end visit here from Salem.

Dean Paul Jacobson of the University of Oregon, quoted last week as saying President Johnson would visit Astoria in February, said today that "as far as I know it's just a rumor and I'd forget it."

This community had considerable maritime excitement Saturday, with one ship nudging a corner of the cofferdam of Astoria bridge Pier 169 and punching a hole in itself, then another ship running aground apparently in mid-channel.

With two ships helpless in mid-channel on a foggy night, the Coast Guard and bar pilots agreed it was desirable to halt all navigation, and did so for most of the night. The channel is enough for safe navigation but not when blockaded with helpless ships.

We presume the Astoria bridge will be the target of some jibes from the upstate press as a menace to navigation.

Want to buy one of the city's old ornamental street lights, pole and all, for \$10? The city council voted Monday night to make these lights available at that price, first come, first serve. The light globes alone will go for \$2 each.

The S.S. Elaine, 492-foot converted Liberty vessel, was listing quietly in Astoria harbor just south of Tongue Point Monday afternoon following an emergency return from 175 miles at sea with a dangerously shifted million dollar cargo of grain.

### 75 years ago — 1940

Captain George Moskovita, skipper of the deep sea trawler New Zealand, and his crew of two knew they had some big fish in their drag seine Monday afternoon off the mouth of the Columbia River. When they finally succeeded in getting their catch aboard the 66-foot trawler, the fish proved to be a 300-pound soupfin shark, probably the largest ever landed here. It was more than eight feet long.

Calling for bids on parking meters was authorized by the city council Monday night, following a report by the city manager that the 1940 budget would not permit hiring of extra policemen to regulate traffic congestion in this city.

Figures showing that Seaside's population has doubled since 1931, that her tourist trade is growing rapidly, and that it will continue to grow in the future were presented to Major C.R. Moore, district U.S. Army engineer, Portland, at a hearing in Seaside Tuesday afternoon.

The bill introduced by Congressman James Mott for establishment of a nautical school at Astoria is result of an idea originating with O.D. Adams, Oregon state director of vocational education, for a school here, to train merchant marine seamen, fishermen and others engaged in nautical trades in the Oregon-Washington area.

Mr. Adams was informed by the national maritime commission that the number of such stations was limited by statute and hence a special act of congress was needed to provide for one here.

Astoria probably leads the nation in per-capita contribution to Finnish relief. This fact came to light this afternoon when the Finnish Relief Fund reported through the United Press from New York that Virginia, Minn., with 12,000 population, led the nation with contributions of \$4,200 to January 4, or 35 cents per-capita.

But here in Astoria the per-capita contribution is considerably higher. Before the Finnish Relief Fund began its national drive under leadership of Herbert Hoover, the Knights of Kaleva lodge here had conducted a campaign of its own which brought in some \$5,000 before the Hoover-headed drive even started.

# How expensive it is to be poor

By CHARLES M. BLOW  
*New York Times News Service*

This month, the Pew Research Center released a study that found that most wealthy Americans believed "poor people today have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing anything in return."

This is an infuriatingly obtuse view of what it means to be poor in this country — the soul-rending omnipresence of worry and fear, of weariness and fatigue.

This can be the view only of those who have not known — or have long forgotten — what poverty truly means.

"Easy" is a word not easily spoken among the poor. Things are hard — the times are hard, the work is hard, the way is hard. "Easy" is for uninformed explanations issued by the willfully callous and the haughtily blind.

Allow me to explain, as James Baldwin put it, a few illustrations of "how extremely expensive it is to be poor."

First, many poor people work, but they just don't make enough to move out of poverty — an estimated 11 million Americans fall into this category.

So, as the Pew report pointed out, "more than half of the least secure group reports receiving at least one type of means-tested government benefit."

And yet, whatever the poor earn is likely to be more heavily taxed than the earnings of wealthier citizens, according to a new analysis by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. As *The New York Times* put it last week:

"According to the study, in 2015 the poorest fifth of Americans will pay on average 10.9 percent of their income in state and local taxes, the middle fifth

will pay 9.4 percent and the top 1 percent will average 5.4 percent."

In addition, many low-income people are "unbanked" (not served by a financial institution), and thus nearly eaten alive by exorbitant fees. As the St. Louis Federal Reserve pointed out in 2010:

"Unbanked consumers spend approximately 2.5 to 3 percent of a government benefits check and between 4 percent and 5 percent of payroll check just to cash them. Additional dollars are spent to purchase money orders to pay routine monthly expenses. When you consider the cost for cashing a bi-weekly payroll check and buying about six money orders each month, a household with a net income of \$20,000 may pay as much as \$1,200 annually for alternative service fees — substantially more than the expense of a monthly checking account."

Even when low-income people can become affiliated with a bank, those banks are increasing making them pay "steep rates for loans and high fees on basic checking accounts," as *The Times' DealBook* blog put it last year.

And poor people can have a hard time getting credit. As *The Washington Post* put it, the excesses of

the subprime boom have led conventional banks to stay away from the riskiest borrowers, leaving them "all but cut off from access to big loans, like mortgages."

One way to move up the ladder and out of poverty is through higher education, but even that is not without disproportionate costs. As the Institute for College Access and Success noted in March:

"Graduates who received Pell Grants, most of whom had family incomes under \$40,000, were much more likely to borrow and to borrow



Charles Blow

more. Among graduating seniors who ever received a Pell Grant, 88 percent had student loans in 2012, with an average of \$31,200 per borrower. In contrast, 53 percent of those who never received a Pell Grant had debt, with an average of \$26,450 per borrower."

And often, work or school requires transportation, which can be another outrageous expense. According to the

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights:

"Low- and moderate-income households spend 42 percent of their total annual income on transportation, including those who live in rural areas, as compared to middle-income households, who spend less than 22 percent of their annual income on transportation."

And besides, having a car can make prime targets of the poor. One pernicious practice that the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. — and the protests that followed — resurfaced was the degree to which some local municipalities profit from police departments targeting poor communities, with a raft of stops, fines, summonses and arrests supported by police actions and complicit courts.

As NPR reported in August: "In 2013, the municipal court in Ferguson — a city of 21,135 people — issued 32,975 arrest warrants for nonviolent offenses, mostly driving violations."

The story continued: "ArchCity Defenders, a St. Louis-area public defender group, says in its report that more than half the courts in St. Louis County engage in the 'illegal and harmful practices' of charging high court fines and fees on nonviolent offenses like traffic violations — and then arresting people when they don't pay."

The list of hardships could go on for several more columns, but you get the point: Being poor is anything but easy.

*'Easy' is a word not easily spoken among the poor.*

## A Guantanamo detainee's diary

By JOE NOCERA  
*New York Times News Service*

Last week, several Republican senators, including John McCain, called on President Barack Obama to stop releasing detainees from the prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

Their argument was that after the terror attacks in Paris, the 122 prisoners still in Guantánamo should be made to stay right where they are, where they can do the West no harm.

Tuesday, one of those detainees, Mohamedou Ould Slahi, who was sent to Guantánamo in 2002 and remains there to this day, is poised to offer a powerful rejoinder. Three years into his detention — years during which he was isolated, tortured, beaten, sexually abused and humiliated — Slahi wrote a 466-page, 122,000-word account of what had happened to him up to that point.

His manuscript was immediately classified, and it took years of litigation and negotiation by Slahi's pro bono lawyers to force the military to declassify a redacted version. Even with the redactions, *Guantánamo Diary* is an extraordinary document — "A vision of hell, beyond Orwell, beyond Kafka," as John le Carré aptly describes it in a back cover blurb — that every American should read.

A native of Mauritania, Slahi, 44, is fluent in several languages — he learned English while in Guantánamo — and lived in Canada and Germany as well as the Muslim world. He came under suspicion because an al-Qaida member, who had been based in Montreal — where Slahi had also lived — was arrested and charged with plotting to bomb the Los Angeles International Airport in 1999. Slahi was questioned about this plot several times, but he was always released. After 9/11, Slahi was detained again for questioning. That time, he was turned over to the U.S. authorities, in whose captivity he has been ever since.

What was he accused of? Slahi asked this question of his captors often and was never given a straight answer. This, of course, is part of the problem with Guantánamo, a prison where being formally charged with a crime is a luxury, not a requirement. His efforts to tell the truth — that he had no involvement in any acts of terrorism — only angered his interrogators. "Looks like a dog, walks like a dog, smells like a dog, barks like a dog, must be a dog," one interrogator used to say. That was the best



AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta

Protesters dressed as Guantanamo detainees gather in front of the White House, Jan. 11 in Washington, during a rally to mark the 13th anniversary of detainees at Guantánamo Bay.



Joe Nocera



International Committee of the Red Cross via Wikimedia Commons

Mohamedou Ould Slahi

his captors could do to explain why he was there. Yet the military was so sure he was a key al-Qaida player that he was subjected to "special interrogation" techniques that had been signed off by the secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, himself.

"Special interrogation techniques," of course, is a euphemism for torture. The sections of the book that describe his torture make for harrowing reading. Slahi was so sleep-deprived that he eventually started to hallucinate. Chained to the ground, he was forced to "stand" in positions that were extremely painful. Interrogators went at him in shifts — 24 hours a day. Sometimes during interrogations, female interrogators rubbed their breasts over his body and fondled him.

It is hard to read about his torture without feeling a sense of shame.

Does Slahi crack? Of course: To get the torture to stop, he finally lied, telling his interrogators what he thought they wanted to hear, just as torture victims have done since the Inquisition. "Torture doesn't guarantee that the detainee cooperates," writes Slahi. "In order to stop torture, the detainee has to please his assailant, even with untruthful, and sometime misleading (intelligence)." McCain, who was tortured in Vietnam, knows this; last month, he made

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a powerful speech in which he condemned America's use of torture, saying, "the use of torture compromises that which most distinguishes us from our enemies, our belief that all people, even captured enemies, possess basic human rights." That is also why it is so disheartening that McCain has allied himself with those who want to keep Guantánamo open.

In 2010, a federal district judge ruled in favor of Slahi's habeas corpus petition because the evidence against him was so thin. The government appealed, and the order remains in limbo.

I asked Nancy Hollander, one of Slahi's lawyers, to describe her client. "He is funny, smart, compassionate and thoughtful," she said. All of these qualities come through in his memoir, which is surprisingly without rancor. "I have only written what I experienced, what I saw, and what I learned firsthand," he writes toward the end of his book. "I have tried not to exaggerate, nor to understate. I have tried to be as fair as possible, to the U.S. government, to my brothers, and to myself." One of the wonders of the book is that he does come across as fair to all, even his torturers.

But the quote that sticks with me most is something that one of his guards told him, something that could stand as a fitting epitaph for Guantánamo itself: "I know I can go to hell for what I did to you."