

Finding yourself on OREGON'S BEACHES

Story by Matt Love • Illustration by Sally Lackaff

In the spring of 1997, not long after my 33rd birthday, I awakened in my Portland loft to the reality that I craved a total revolution of my mind, body and spirit. Truly, I was lost as a human being and unable to envision a path to fulfilling any of my dreams. I had always wanted to become a writer, a spiritual person and an Oregonian of merit, but life in Portland distracted me at every turn. On a whim, I accepted a teaching job at a small rural school on the Oregon Coast, needing to believe something transformative might happen to me. I honestly felt this was my last shot at doing something important with my life.

Something did happen after heading west. I met the beach, we fell in love, and it has since become the greatest creative, spiritual and sensual force in my life. But my transformation only manifested because I live in Oregon, and long ago the state decided to forge an exceptional path by protecting its ocean beaches — its “great birthright” as former Oregon Gov.

Oswald West defined it — from privatization. That exceptional path also guaranteed public access to the beach — by law.

A couple years after relocating to the coast, I started going to the beach all the time with my three big dogs, at all hours, in all weather, never paying a cent for the privilege of doing so. Strange, wonderful things unfolded at the beach, and I heard the “old sound of the ocean” as the poet Robinson Jeffers called it. In hearing the “old” I began hearing something new: a passion for living, caring and creating that heretofore I never knew existed within me. I also began writing about these very things.

One day as I rambled down my favorite beach, Nestucca Spit, in Pacific City, I wondered aloud: “Why are Oregon’s beaches public and free to use, unlike most of the inhabited coastal places around the world I’ve visited?” My curiosity piqued, I started investigating this historical question. It took several years, but eventually I discovered my writing voice during this

