

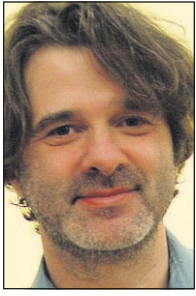
OPB's 'Astoria' show fell short

By MATT LOVE
For The Daily Astorian

A couple of days after watching AOPB's boring and clichéd Oregon Experience program about Astoria with my students at Astoria High School, I eavesdropped on a man talking on his phone and working on a laptop at 14th Street Coffee.

He was an HBO producer of some kind, visiting Astoria for a break from his hectic production schedule of Chicago, New York and San Francisco.

Apparently, he frequented Astoria to disappear, catch up on personal correspondence, soak up inspiration and relax. He was going to be here for a week.



Matt Love

That's right, Astoria. As I listened in, utterly fascinated by his lush description of Astoria to someone who had never heard of the city, it occurred to me how badly OPB missed what's happening in Astoria, particularly how its unique history informs and animates present-day reality.

Perfunctory. Intellectually lazy. The usual suspects. Trite. Tepid. Academic. Prudish.

These are the words I use to describe OPB's documentary about Astoria. It shocked me how a major Oregon media outlet could produce such mediocre content about a rich story. In fact, I would say OPB missed the wonderful complete story of Astoria altogether. There is certainly a lot more to this place than Lewis and Clark, the Astor fur men, logging, salmon and the great fire of 1922, but you would never know that watching this show. Too bad the HBO guy wasn't in charge of the production. Astoria is ripe for such a treatment.

Sure, OPB only had 30 minutes to unfold the story and some of the historical footage was awesome, but they lingered way too long on Astoria's past and didn't spend a single second on its dynamic present or future potential. Shouldn't a documentary of a city's history also depict current reality? Shouldn't it explore how a city's rugged history has unwittingly become critical to its future?

I moved to Astoria in the late fall of 2013 and have spent considerable time since then studying the city's unique history and interacting with its residents, many of them newcomers like me, drawn to this river town for creative inspiration. I was so enraptured with the stories I read or unearthed on my own, that I wrote a book about Astoria, a book I didn't envision when I moved here. (It will be out later this month.)



Courtesy of Columbia River Maritime Museum

A logger family.

Writer's Notebook

OPB's *Astoria* ignored so much. Their ignorance almost seemed willful.

- Nothing about Astoria's sinful, pre-Prohibition heyday that's presented so well by the Clatsop County Historical Society's Heritage Museum and Astor Street Opry Company.

- Nothing about the city's economic lethargy of the late 1990s and subsequent and ongoing renaissance. Where was that crucial story? Why not hear from some of the entrepreneurs who helped repurpose this place?

- Nothing about beer, the Goonies or the eccentric Flavels!

- Nothing about how Astoria has a regular and fabulous drag show.

- Nothing about members of the prodigious creative class. Not one word from them.

- Nothing about all the raw logs being shipped to Asia.

- Nothing about the tension between the commercial and sports fishing industries.

- Nothing about the Fisher Poets Gathering or Festival of Dark Arts, two events without parallel in the region, or country for that matter.

- Nothing about the threat of gentrification.

- Nothing from anyone under 50 years old. There are young people here. I teach a lot of them, and their writing about



Courtesy of Columbia River Maritime Museum

Cannery workers prepping tuna for packing.

Astoria was infinitely more revealing and entertaining than anything I saw from OPB. It was more HBO in nature.

This was documentary filming at its worst: drive in, drive through, strip mine some clichés, interview a narrow range of people and package historical rehash anyone could have read on Wikipedia.

All the people interviewed for the program were passionate and informative about Astoria's past. The problem was, OPB left it at that. They barely probed. They were incurious. It would be analogous to me writing a book about Portland and only interview people who worked at the Oregon Historical Society. How authentic would that be?

OPB did the unthinkable; they made

Astoria look like a relic and a boring one at that. I don't see this place as aggrieved or stuck in the past as some rural Oregon communities seem to be when faced with a dwindling natural resource-based economy. There is entrepreneurial and creative spirit here. There is also staggering history. Today, the new and old of a historic place work in concert with each other like no other rural town in Oregon.

I can't believe OPB didn't get that. It's everywhere around here.

(OPB's documentary on Astoria streams for free at <http://bit.ly/185bWbO>)

Matt Love lives in Astoria and is the publisher of *Nestucca Spit Press*. He is the author/editor of 13 books about Oregon. They are available at coastal bookstores and through www.nestuccaspitpress.com

Open forum

Consequences

My last motorcycle helmet, with that 2-inch crater on its left side, is kept in remembrance of that last ride. The man in the car stopped at the intersection, looking both ways and still not seeing me as I come toward him from his right. He starts forward and I hit him broadside, flipping over the top of his car and landing, hip, shoulder, then head on the other side.

I just read in *The Daily Astorian* that Betsy Johnson is sponsoring Oregon House Bill 2989, which would allow adults to ride their motorcycles without helmets, as long as they have the insurance to cover the costs of any injuries ("Betsy's bills," Feb. 26).

It's required that I buckle up while driving my car, though I

am encased in a body of metal. But don't let anything come between a bike rider and his connection to the very hard surface of the open road, or a tree, or a car, as long as he can pay for the consequences.

JULIE SNYDER
Astoria/Brownsmead

Define stewardship

Ever since reading about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plan to kill 11,000 cormorants on an island the Corps created, I have been going about with a sense of dread and shame. I've been praying that the Corps would come up with another solution to this so-called managing of two species.

Birds slaughtered by the thousands? Is this kind of car-

nage our definition of stewardship? Have there been, are there now other ideologies that employ this reasoning?

Those who support the killing may say, "This isn't the same." I think it is. The operating principle is: Wipe out what you don't like, what you don't understand or can't control — solving a perceived problem by wholesale, unremitting destruction.

I imagine this ruthless expedience will seem like business as usual to those who are the product of this country's 19th century philosophy, arrogantly termed "manifest destiny." This doctrine and its implications have made inroads into all forms of subjugation.

But I don't believe the deliberate extermination of these birds will be a matter of indif-

ference to the One who, (as a poet has written, "by a unique ordering, so fashioned man an intellectual being whose singular delight would be to conspire with Him to help each creature attain its end the more abundantly.")

RAE MARIE
ZIMMERLING
Gearhart

Disregard the rules

Erick Bengel's article indicates how the Cannon Beach City Council gobbled many citizens of Cannon Beach by its March 3 four to one decision to grant Jeff Nicholson, a poor rich man who pumped \$1 million into a risky project, his request to build four houses on property zoned for one ("Cannon Beach

OKs development, denies dune grading bid," *The Daily Astorian*, March 4).

After citizens had been promised they could have five minutes at the beginning of the meeting to deliver their objection to the project, they were insulted by the city's land use attorney when he advised the councilors not to allow any testimony before their final vote.

With this decision, the City Council will allow four houses and a so-called "living wall" which will destroy one of the city's nicest natural slopes. The "living wall," which should have been "dead on arrival," will extend 120 feet and be 10 feet or higher in some places.

The Planning Commission, following the intention of the city code, voted 6 to 1 against Nicholson's profit-making

project. But the land use attorney hired by the City Council seemed more interested in Nicholson's investment, which needed more seed money through the sale of three of the houses, than he was in the city code.

This leaves only one conclusion: In order to help a man so poor that all he owns is money, the City Council has chosen to help him make more by granting his request to change the code and set a precedent for further development.

Every person has a right to develop land; but in Nicholson's case, development has eclipsed the land. Such blatant disregard for the rules has left the City Council's decision echoing the old saw, "The world ain't round it's crooked."

REX AMOS
Cannon Beach



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