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Old building, new owner

Enlightened landlords are critical to a town’s revival

Astoria’s rebirth would not have happened without enlightened landlords.

Some of those were non-profits, such as Liberty Restoration, Inc., which restored the Liberty Theater, and the Columbia River Maritime Museum, which restored the Astoria railway station and repurposed it the Barbey Maritime Center.

Some landlords were private investors such as Chester Trabucco, who restored the Hotel Elliott or Robert Jacob, who built the Cannery Pier Hotel.

Some were governments, such as the City of Astoria, which put City Hall through a complete upgrade, and Clatsop County, which restored the Guy Boyington Building.

Bill Lind and Virginia Laughery, who have sold the Carruthers Building at 12th and Commercial, converted a former drug store (Owl Drug, which famously appeared in “Kindergarten Cop”) into a grand space that became a sculpture gallery and then a restaurant.

In all of these ventures, the property owners are local. That is a critical fact, because neglectful absentee landlords are the bane of small towns. Edward Eng of Los Angeles, for instance, was content to let the Liberty Theater slide into a state of deep atrophy.

In selling the Carruthers Building to Jim Defeo, Bill Lind said he was especially pleased to find a buyer who was committed to downtown’s future. A former Portland restaurateur who moved here in 2006, Defeo has made his mark by bringing new life to 11th Street with the Astoria Coffee House and Bistro as well as other properties.

Big cities and small towns are in a constant cycle of deterioration, decline, death and renewal. The same is true of the human population of those places. In that cycle, new blood with new ideas is essential. And that’s where a fertile mind like Defeo comes in.

Watershed restoration good for wildlife, humans

Refuge could become increasingly important sanctuary

Efforts to restore tidal connections around the south end of Willapa Bay will reach a new milestone with completion of a project at Greenhead Slough east of Long Beach, Wash.

The project on land acquired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in recent years aroused no vocal objections, in stark contrast to earlier work that removed dikes along a far less publicly visible shoreline abutting uninhabited hills owned by the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge. In that earlier phase, objections largely came from hunters and nearby farmers who feared geese, ducks and elk would all be dislodged from accustomed habitat, along with officials worried about potential flooding of a county road. There is little evidence so far that adverse impacts resulted from the restoration work.

The Greenhead project differs in several important respects. In its case, the “dike” is U.S. Highway 101, which won’t be removed or relocated — though sea level change could eventually force a move later this century. Instead, water passage is being returned to something more like historical rates by eliminating an inadequate culvert, replacing it with a steel bridge. When it’s complete, more than 2,300 acres will become far more accessible to salmon and other species.

Originally established by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1937 to protect migratory birds traveling the eastern edge of the Pacific flyway, the Willapa refuge is certain to become increasingly important as a sanctuary and stop-off place for species

fleeing drought and other climate impacts.

When it comes to fish, controversies between gillnetters and recreational fishermen, along with dissatisfaction with Washington state salmon-management policies, shouldn’t obscure the fact that providing more habitat for salmon is bound to be a good thing. They won’t necessarily find places to spawn in the usually slow-moving waters flowing into Greenhead Slough, but they will greatly benefit from 18 miles of streams in which to feed, mature and hide from predators.

Although it has neared completion without generating much public awareness, there may be some backlash as additional salt intrusion begins to effect fresh-water vegetation visible from the highway. Breeching dikes and allowing saltwater back into former tidal flats around South Bend, Wash., is a continuing irritant for some in that community. Dike changes in Clatsop County haven’t generated as much comment, thus far anyway, perhaps because historic flood plains on the south side of the estuary were less extensive or have been more developed, and so are less suited to restoration.

Shoreline changes, whether initiated by people or nature, will be one of the biggest stories of the 21st century. By taking the initiative and proactively managing the hydrology of local watersheds, we may forestall some negative consequences for habitats, highways and neighborhoods.

Among the ruins, a case of righteousness

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — Christianity, whose presence in the Middle East predates Islam’s by 600 years, is about to be cleansed from the Middle East. Egyptian Copts may have found some respite under Abdel Fatah al-Sissi, but after their persecution under the previous Muslim Brotherhood government, they know how precarious their existence in 90 percent Muslim Egypt remains. Elsewhere, it’s much worse. Twenty-one Copts were beheaded by the Islamic State affiliate in Libya for the crime of being Christian. In those large swaths of Syria and Iraq where the Islamic State rules, the consequences for Christians are terrible — enslavement, exile, torture, massacre, crucifixion.

Over the decades, many Middle Eastern Christians, seeing the rise of political Islam and the intensification of savage sectarian wars, have simply left. Lebanon’s Christians, once more than half the population, are now estimated at about a third. The number of Christians under Palestinian Authority rule in the West Bank has dwindled — in Bethlehem, for example, dropping by half. (The exception, of course, is Israel, where Christians, Arab and non-Arab, enjoy not just protection but civil rights. Their numbers are increasing. But that’s another story.)

Most endangered are the Christians of Syria. Four years ago they numbered about 1.1 million. By now 700,000 have fled. Many of those remaining in country are caught either under radical Islamist rule or in the crossfire between factions. As the larger Christian world looks on passively, their future, like the future of Middle Eastern Christianity writ large, will be determined by Iran, Hezbollah, the Assad dynasty, the Islamic State, the Nusra Front, various other local factions and by regional powers seeking advantage.

Meanwhile, on a more limited scale, there are things that can be

done. Three weeks ago, for example, 150 Syrian Christians were airlifted to refuge and safety in Poland.

That’s the work of the Weidenfeld Safe Havens Fund. It provided the flight and will support the refugees for as long as 18 months as they try to remake their lives.

Charles Krauthammer

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The person behind all this is Lord George Weidenfeld: life peer, philanthropist, publisher (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, established 1949), Europeanist (founder of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue to promote classically liberal European values), proud public Jew (honorary vice president of the World Jewish Congress), lifelong Zionist (he once served as the chief of Cabinet to Israel’s first president, Chaim Weizmann) and, as he will delightedly tell you, the last person to fight a duel at the University of Vienna — with sabers, against a Nazi. (No one died.)

Weidenfeld, now 95, once invoked *Torschlusspanik*, “a German phrase which roughly translates as the ‘panic before the closing of the

doors,”” to explain why “I’m a man in a hurry.” Remarkably healthy and stunningly energetic (as distant cousins, we are often in touch), he appears nowhere near any exit doors. But he is aware of and deeply troubled by the doors closing in on a community in Syria largely abandoned by the world.

In context, the scale of the initial rescue is tragically small. The objective is to rescue 2,000 families. Compared to the carnage in Syria wrought by the pitiless combatants — 230,000 dead, half the 22 million population driven from their homes — it’s a paltry sum. But these are real people who will be saved. And for Weidenfeld, that counts.

Yet he has been criticized for rescuing just Christians. In fact, the U.S. government will not participate because the rescue doesn’t extend to Yazidis, Druze or Shiites.

This comes under the heading of no good deed going unpunished. It’s a rather odd view that because he cannot do everything, he should be admonished for trying to do something. If Weidenfeld were a man of infinite means, the criticism might be valid. As it is, he says rather sensibly, “I can’t save the world.” The Arab states, particularly the Gulf monarchies, are surely not without resources. With so few doing so little for so many, he’s doing what he can.

And for him, it’s personal. In 1938, still a teenager, he was brought from Vienna to London where the Plymouth Brethren took him in and provided for him. He never forgot. He is trying to return the kindness, he explains, to repay the good that Christians did for him 77 years ago. In doing so, he is not just giving hope and a new life to 150 souls, soon to be thousands. He has struck a blow for something exceedingly rare: simple, willful righteousness.

Guns and the two Americas

By TIMOTHY EGAN
New York Times News Service

The waves of mass shootings continue to roll over the United States like surf on the ship of state’s prow. Every few weeks now we get hit with a jolt of cold water. We shake and shudder, and then brace ourselves for the next one.

So we beat on — a nation whose people are 20 times more likely to die of gun violence than those of most other developed countries. The only thing extraordinary about mass shootings in America is how ordinary the killing grounds are — elementary schools, high schools, colleges, military recruitment centers, theaters, parks, churches.

Is no place safe? Actually, several places are. You want protection in a country that allows a deranged man to get an assault weapon to hunt down innocent people in a public space? Go to the airport — that bubble of gun-free security. Or go to a Major League Baseball game, or a stadium in the National Football League.

Our big league venues may be engaging only in security theater, as critics assert, but their owners don’t think so. They now mandate metal detectors to snag weapons, and most of them even ban off-duty cops from bringing guns to the games.

Nationwide, if you want to lessen your chances of getting shot, stay out of the South. The South is the most violent region in the United States and also the place with the highest rate of gun ownership. More guns, easily obtained by the mentally ill, religious fanatics and anti-government extremists, mean more gun deaths.

Better to go to a city or state with gun restrictions, at least if you’re playing the odds. Most of the states with tighter gun laws have fewer gun deaths.

That’s one America, the slightly safer one. It includes government gun-screened zones like airports, courthouses and many high schools. But more significantly, it also covers property used by our most popular obsession, pro football — the free market at work.

The other America is an open-fire zone, backed by politicians who think it should be even more crowded with average people parading around with lethal weapons. Just after the tragedy in a Louisiana theater

a week ago — a shooting by a hate-filled man who was able to legally obtain a gun despite a history of mental illness — Rick Perry called gun-free zones a bad idea.

In his view, echoing that of the fanatics who own the Republican Party by intimidation, everyone should be armed, everywhere. Once a shooting starts, the bad guy with the gun will be killed by the good guy with the gun, somehow able to get a draw on the shooter in a darkened theater or behind a pew in church.

Timothy Egan

What we’re moving toward, then, are regions that are safer than others, and public spaces that are safer than others, led by private enterprise, shunning the gun crazies who want everyone armed.

This scenario almost never happens. The logic is nonsense, the odds of a perfectly timed counter-killer getting the drop on the evil killer unlikely. And even when such a situation does happen, as in the Tucson shooting of 2011, the armed citizen who jumps into the melee can pose a mortal threat to others. In Tucson, an innocent person came within seconds of getting shot by an armed bystander who wasn’t sure whom to shoot.

Most gun-free zones, like the

theater in Lafayette, La., are not gun-free at all. They have no metal detectors or screening — that would cost too much, the theater owners claim. Gun-free is a suggestion, and therefore a misnomer. Eventually, the more prosperous theaters in better communities will pay for metal detectors, further setting apart the two Americas in our age of mass shootings.

The Mall of America — more than 500 stores in 4 miles of retail space, drawing 40 million annual visitors to a climate-controlled part of Minnesota — is trying to be a gun-free zone. “Guns are banned on these premises” is the mall’s official policy.

If the mall took up Rick Perry’s suggestion, shoppers could roam among the chain stores packing heat, ready for a shootout. The owners of that vast operation, similar to those who stage concerts and pro sports, think otherwise. The mall has a security force of more than 100 people. Yeah — I hear the joke about the feckless mall cops. But the Mall of America trusts them more than well-armed shoppers to protect people, as they should.

Surprising though it may seem, gun ownership is declining overall in the United States. We are still awash with weapons — nearly a third of all American households have an adult with a gun. But that’s down from nearly half of all households in 1973.

What we’re moving toward, then, are regions that are safer than others, and public spaces that are safer than others, led by private enterprise, shunning the gun crazies who want everyone armed. The new reality comes with the inconvenience and hassle of screening and pat-downs similar to the routines at airports — enforced gun-free zones, not mere suggestions.

As a way to make everyday life seem less frightening, the new reality is absurd. But that’s the cost, apparently, of an extreme interpretation of a constitutional amendment designed to fend off British tyranny, a freedom that has become a tyranny in itself.