FRIDAY EXTRA!

The Daily Astorian | Friday, October 16, 2015 | Weekend Edition

Untainted Love

Foresight, politics, behind historic Beach Bill

By MATT LOVE
Special to The Daily Astorian

Not too long ago, I received the following Facebook message from someone I didn't know. It read:

"I always enjoy your writings (about Oregon's beaches). Today was the first time I noticed the entrance of politics in one of your articles. Just my opinion, but that is best left out as to not taint the beauty of your writings. Thanks"

This message braced and confused me. I had no idea what piece she was referring to since I contribute to multiple publications about Oregon's beaches and virtually everything I write in this context is political, although I do like to think I tell it slant. It's the only way to reach people these days.

I strenuously beg to differ on the subject of whether the "entrance" of politics taints my writing about the "great birthright," as former Gov. Oswald West memorably dubbed Oregon's publicly-owned beaches. On the contrary, I believe it doesn't taint. Rather, it informs, imbues and inflames. Indeed, politics are the lifeblood of all my writing about beaches in Oregon. Remarkable politics constitute the only reason Oregon established its unique legacy of publicly-owned beaches.

Many years ago, the progressive politics of people, bipartisanship, community and thinking about future generations triumphed over individual greed, gated beachfront communities and reactionary shortsightedness. Actually, these progressive politics from 50 and 100 years ago did more than triumph — they annihilated the always bad notion of private ownership of beaches. If you don't understand that about the Oregon Coast and you move here, buy expensive beachfront property and unpack the political baggage from your former place and expect to wear those clothes and attitudes in Oregon, then you are going to get rolled over and I will help do the rolling. I relish the opportunity. It's my favorite thing to do in my life. It's become the rock 'n' roll of my life.

I will never stop reminding readers of Oregon's monumental political achievements to protect public beaches and free access to them. It's the most important assignment of my writing and teaching life.

The magnificent environmental journalist Rebecca Solnit once characterized all writing about landscape as "political," because all landscape was either: stolen, traded, exploited, ruined, protected, or rehabilitated through political decisions. I heartily agree with Solnit.

All my passionate writing about Oregon's beaches by a beach-obsessed Oregon writer like me wouldn't exist without the political victories of West's 1913 law declaring the wet sands areas a public highway and 1967's Beach Bill, which preserved the dry sands areas for exclusive use by the public … "forever."

You think a writer like me exists in Southern California, Florida or New Jersey?

No.

"Forever." That's what it reads in statute in the Beach Bill..

Unfortunately, forever in Oregon conservation politics doesn't last forever if people, schools, organizations, civic groups, chambers of commerce and politicians don't remember, extol and commemorate the victories, such as the looming 50th anniversary of the Beach Bill on July 7, 2017. On that sacred day, I plan on leading the largest civic gathering in celebration of a piece of legislation in Oregon history.

Naturally, I will celebrate on the beach. Will you join me? I'm calling the gig "Never Give a Inch (of sand)." It's the gig of my lifetime. (Respond to my email address below if you want to join the party or help stage it.)

We need a mutual multipronged effort to protect the great birthright, from artists to rock hounds to rockers to surfers to elected officials to tavern dwellers. The effort to protect requires constant vigilance. Just the slightest glance in an indifferent direction and the legacy becomes imperiled and ripe for desecration from private interests.

Now that would be the real taint.

Matt Love is the author and editor of 14 books about Oregon, including, "The Great Birthright," a detective novel about defeating the evil forces who want to privatize Oregon's beaches. They are available at coastal bookstores and through www.nestuccaspitpress.com. To add your name to the list to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Beach Bill, email Love at nestuccaspitpress@gmail.com

The author, Matt Love, with a fort, enjoying Oregon's "great birthright."
Submitted Photo