

# Reconnect with your old friends; protect yourself from wickedness



EO Media Group/File Photo

Retired Pacific County Sheriff Jerry Benning adored old cars and big motorcycles.

Last weekend as rain assaulted the house like a terrorist seeking a way in, I comforted myself by salvaging black-and-white negatives from the 1980s — images of some original friends back when we were first figuring out who we were.

Throwing their photos on Facebook was a sort of digital reunion, renewing connections with dozens of cherished people.

I commend it to you all — not Facebook necessarily, but taking time to reach out to those who knew us when we were pimply, innocent, ignorant and inept. Our shared embarrassments make us stronger. The fast-disappearing tradition of sending Christmas cards was a gesture in this direction. Thanks to the Internet, we now can do so much more, and in real time.



Matt Winters

Friendship is risky — the danger of falling too closely in love, or hurting each other's feelings, or simply caring enough about someone that their pain in some way becomes our own. But they are irreplaceable, the essence of a full life.

Even with miraculous technologies to bring us together, negligently allowing friendships to wither away or fray around the edges is a way of life. We depend on television to provide safe, vicarious experiences instead of having them ourselves. I'm as bad as anyone.

Give yourself an old friend or two this Christmas. Find their number or look them up on Facebook. Apologize for not staying in touch. Rediscover why you became friends in the first place. Make firm plans to meet in person, then follow through. It's a weird thing, but people up and die all the time. Next year may be too late.

Speaking of friends and dying, I was saddened to learn this week of the passing of former Pacific County Sheriff Jerry Benning.

He was from South Dakota and planned his year around going to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. He also was an enthusiastic Democrat and savored politicking the way a butcher enjoys carving a perfect steak. In fact, he was a professional butcher before and after becoming sheriff.

We weren't close pals, but spent many hours conversing when he was in office in the 1990s. Most sheriffs I've known, maybe half a dozen in all, are or were safekeepers of amazing tales. Maybe their storytelling talent is a cause and effect of being small-town politicians, combined with the fact that they get to know lots of juicy details about outrageous misbehavior and dubious judgment among our fellow residents.

Jerry reveled in an anecdote. He'd get himself laughing about some ridiculous situation, tell me about it, and torture me by swearing me to secrecy.

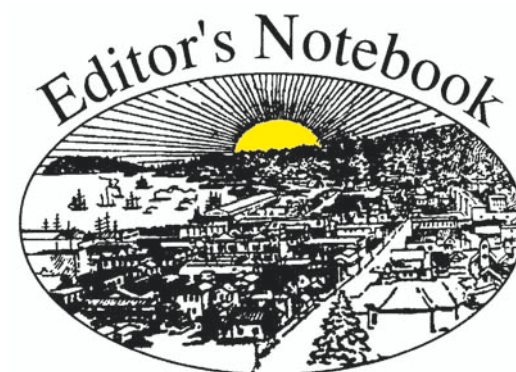
In a serious vein, I know he was haunted by unsolved crime mysteries that will now follow him to his grave. One concerned a transient who, the theory goes, hitched a ride from Astoria and was slaughtered on a logging road on the north shore above Knappton — perhaps the victim of a roving human-shaped monster.

Something wicked this way came. Let's pray it passed on through.



J. Glover/Submitted Photo

Nova, an American golden eagle in the care of the Southeastern Raptor Rehabilitation Center at Auburn University.



A peculiar report last week was the sort of thing that makes life so funny and memorable on the wild outer coast. We really should have our own reality TV show.

The local funeral home, Penttila's Chapel By the Sea, was having issues with its pipes and called Don Anderson, quite possibly the nicest plumber on the planet, to come and see what was wrong.

Don rolled up in his van, made his way into the building's crawlspace, and just as quickly exited. He went upstairs and told kind-hearted undertaker Dan Hickey something like, "I think I've spotted part of your problem. You have a bear living in the basement." While they talked, it rose from slumber and lumbered away; wildlife officers were called to try to find it and escort it out of town.

It wasn't up to anything at funeral parlor other than freeloading a warm place to snooze, but neighbors — including the *Chinook Observer* — had been vocally wondering where the bear was hiding out that was so often eating our garbage. Now we know.

In an example of small-town connections, Jerry Benning's close friend and retired Undersheriff Dale Staudenraus is an associate at Penttila's. (Before I leave the subject, allow me to say that Penttila's owners Ron and Liz Hylton and everyone who works there are among our area's most genuine unsung heroes.)

## Give yourself an old friend or two this Christmas.

Lastly, I've heard a report of a golden eagle living, at least temporarily, around Upper Astoria. They are astounding birds, the very definition of "majestic." While sometimes confused with immature bald eagles that don't yet have their white headdress, I'm inclined to believe this really is a golden.

They're not unheard of here; Mike Patterson includes them on his "Checklist for Birds of Clatsop County," though they are not on the Willapa Bay list.

Bald eagles are a dollar a dozen near the Columbia estuary, so it's fun to learn of a golden. While bald eagles are related to ospreys, golden eagles are kin to red-tailed hawks and have always been among my favorite birds.

Biologists believe they are much aided by clearcuts, which let them see what they are hunting. They've been clocked diving toward prey at more than 150 mph.

Defending them was my publisher uncle Tom Bell's first major wildlife crusade. They were once indiscriminately poisoned and shot by cattle and sheep ranchers. I have a vivid childhood memory of driving with my parents in Wyoming's Red Desert and encountering a dead one that had been nailed to a fence — crucified — its nearly 4-foot wings outstretched, tattered feathers being slowly eaten away by the unending wind.

I am confident we will be infinitely better neighbors to our goldens.

— M.S.W.

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