

New beginnings

The future has vast potential, and achieving your dreams is possible

“And now we welcome the New Year, full of things that have never been,” said the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. He spoke not of the well-intentioned resolutions we never keep, but of the vast potentiality of the future. Life is full of new beginnings of all sorts, and every beginning is the result of an ending.

Sara Maya worked six years in the fields and nurseries around Woodburn, Oregon, and in the canneries of Astoria before moving back home to Oaxaca, Mexico, with her husband and two children. Two years later, they moved back to Astoria for the sake of the children’s education, and Maya began working in restaurants.

“I love to cook. When you grow up in Oaxaca,” she says, “you learn to cook.” But something was missing. “When I went to Mexican restaurants looking for real Mexican food, it was all Mexican-American,” she says. “Mexican food isn’t just beans and rice, and every state has its own food. It’s very diverse.”

While working at Clemente’s Restaurant, Maya decided to start her own restaurant, and Lisa Clement encouraged her. “I was scared because I didn’t know how to run a business,” Maya says, although she had taken accounting and business courses at the insistence of her aunt.

Maya had saved her money for five years, and in 2012 she made her decision. “If I lost my savings, it would be okay,” she thought, “and if I won, it would be good.” A month after leaving Clemente’s, she opened her restaurant and named it for the famous Oaxacan pre-Columbian site Monte Albán. Now at MonteAlban Restaurant, she cooks food, “everything natural, no cans, fresh vegetables, homemade tortillas, Mexican cheese.”

Maya’s new beginning means that now

Coastal Life

Story by DWIGHT CASWELL



Photo by Dwight Caswell

A Long Beach Peninsula native, David Kim dreamed of owning a bed-and-breakfast. After a difficult year full of loss and a big move, he now works at the Shelburne Inn in Seaview, Washington.

Astoria has real Oaxacan food.

Maya moved from field to restaurant. “Farmer Fred” Johnson’s new beginning was exactly the opposite. As a restaurateur and chef he fell in love with the superior flavor of fresh food. “Fresh has life force,” he says. “It leads to a new level of cooking. I got the bigger picture: Develop and grow a local food system.”

Soon Johnson left his successful Vashon Island restaurant behind and was looking for land. “I found this farm in Naselle and fell in love with it. I went sort of crazy. I bought this farm and started trying to be a farmer.”

He bought the 113-year-old, 70-acre farm in 2003. It’s been challenging ever since. “I thought restaurants were difficult,” Johnson says, “but by God, farming is more difficult. I’m still trying to figure it out.” Now he’s “totally enthused” about intensive grazing systems, and restoring salmon habitat.

Johnson’s new beginning is still a work in progress, the successes slow and hard-won, “but I love the work,” he says: “Throwing caution to the winds and trying to be a farm-

er was definitely a romantic notion, but I’m glad I did it. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.”

Maya and Johnson chose their new beginnings, but David Kim had his thrust upon him. Or did fate give him a little shove in the right direction?

A restaurant manager and consultant, Kim says he was tired of “working 60-70 hours a week, giving them everything, and getting little in return.” As a child he had decided that he wanted to own a tavern and café, like one owned by a family friend. By the time he was in culinary school he had decided that he would someday own a bed-and-breakfast, and it had to be on the Long Beach Peninsula, where he was born.

Then came the worst year of his life, but a year that would end with him at an inn and restaurant on the Long Beach Peninsula.

In April of 2014, Kim’s wife died, and he made up his mind: “It was time for a new beginning.” He quit his job in Kansas City, Missouri, sold everything, bought a



Photo by Dwight Caswell

Sara Maya saved money for five years before opening MonteAlban Mexican Restaurant in Astoria with her husband in 2012,



EO Media Group file photo

Farmer Fred Johnson stands in one of his greenhouses on his farm in Naselle, Washington.

second-hand motor home, and moved to Long Beach. Eventually. Joining him on the journey were his 22-year-old son and his 77-year-old mother (“an adventure in itself”), and in Salina, Kansas the motor home caught fire, but they made it to Long Beach. Then Kim had a heart attack.

He recovered his health and, unable to purchase a B&B, applied for a job at one. “I was lucky they had a job available,” he says. “It fit my skill set, and if I tried to create a business here, this is absolutely as spot-on as it can be.”

He looks around him at the stained glass and varnished wood of Seaview’s Shelburne Inn. “I love a place with stories,” Kim says, “and there are so many stories here that they would take forever to tell.”

And every one of those stories, whether of loss or of promise, was a new beginning.