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# DEATH AND THE OCEAN

People, like the sea, don't really belong to anything linear

By MATT LOVE  
Special to The Daily Astorian

In early February, a 17-year old Washington state girl fell into the ocean at Cape Kiwanda in Pacific City and died. In June 2015, a 16-year old Salem boy fell to his death at approximately the same spot, one of the most treacherous places on the Oregon Coast and one where visitors routinely ignore warnings and climb over fences to get closer to the ocean.

### A tragic collection

Over my long years in residency at the Oregon Coast, I have taken to collecting newspaper articles that document ocean-related deaths. Most involve tragic or senseless accidents of some predictable kind, but occasionally I find stories of unsuccessful suicide attempts. You rarely read accounts of the successful ones because journalistic tradition decrees the press not report them, lest it encourage others.

A couple of years ago, a story from Chinook, Washington, intrigued me and I think about it every now and then. An article, in part, read:

*SEAVIEW — In an apparent suicide attempt, a 25-year-old man walked fully clothed into the ocean early in the morning May 8. Another man, parked at the Seaview Beach approach, saw him and called 911. He said he tried to speak to him, but the man kept walking into the ocean. The other man stayed and kept an eye on him until emergency responders arrived.*

*Fire District One and the South Pacific County Technical Rescue Team responded and sent a rescue swimmer in after the man. A personal water craft rescue vessel followed, and they pulled him from the water. The rescue took about half an hour.*

This particular story fascinated me because the man who intervened and called 911 could have easily been me. I

typically go to the beach in the very early morning, and in my 19 years of coastal living have observed several people doing very strange things at that hour. Very strange indeed. Nevertheless, I have never intervened, although I surely know that day is coming; I will act.

### Harrowing tales

Some of the more harrowing stories of death and the local ocean include:

- The groom vanished by a wave off Cape Kiwanda while his bride took a photograph on the first day of their marriage.
  - The man in Lincoln City drowned while trying to rescue his dog from the waves. The dog survived.
  - The South Beach woman suffering from dementia apparently disappeared into the ocean.
  - The married couple from Portland celebrating their anniversary in Newport knocked off the South Jetty of Yaquina Bay by a wave.
  - The Filipino woman visiting her American boyfriend for the first time dragged away by the Neskowin surf as he was ready to propose.
  - The crabber last seen atop the breakers of the Alsea Bay bar after his boat capsized. His wife made it ashore.
  - Two Eugene teenagers on a school outing swept away off the rocks by a wave at Yachats.
- And many more, every year. They always keep coming. I've clipped three

articles this year and it's only February.

I have often asked myself: Why compile these stories? My straight answer is: I don't know. Over the years, some of these stories have worked their way into my writing and teaching, but that doesn't mean when I first see them as news I exclaim, "Wow, I've got to clip that for use in a column, book or lesson about the ocean." It doesn't work that way for me.

### A desired reunion

Morbid things have never interested me as a person or a writer. And when I say I want to end my sentient life by falling into Hart's Cove on Cascade Head on the central Oregon Coast, I see that certainly not as dark or depressing, but rather as a culminating celebration of my life and desired reunion where all life began on earth — the sea. It also means I'll return as rain that much quicker.

Really, I had no idea where I was going with this meandering meditation on life and death connected to the ocean when I composed it entirely in my mind while walking with Sonny the husky at the ocean's edge.

Perhaps that is the point. The ocean doesn't really belong to anything linear anymore; I doubt it ever has. Perhaps people don't either.

*Matt Love is the author and editor of 14 books about Oregon. They are available at all coastal bookstores or through [www.nestuccaspitpress.com](http://www.nestuccaspitpress.com).*