



Photo by Dwight Caswell

# THE MYTH OF ISLANDS

By **ED HUNT**  
For *The Daily Astorian*

An island is a lie. On my way to work, I drive along Washington's Willapa Bay and pass by the two islands that can be seen from the mainland.

Long Island crowds just feet from the highway that hugs the shore. Heavily forested it stretches away to the horizon, appearing as solid shoreline. Long Island holds a grove of ancient forest and in days past was inhabited with settlements. There is a ferry landing just off the road that used to bring trucks back and forth across the narrow thread of water that separates it from the rest of Washington state.

A little farther on is a defiant little islet several hundred yards from where the tourist pass by on their way to the beach. The U.S. Geological Survey named it Round Island back in 1858; locals call it Baby Island. Its shoulders hunched and spiked with snags and cedar that burl in the winter storms. Only a few acres of brush and trees, it appears a picturesque myth centered in the waters of the bay. Steep rocks rising from the silver gray waters and lonely alone.

We like to think of ourselves as islands, as individuals, as ecosystems wholly within ourselves. We like to believe that our actions affect no one beyond our ragged shore. We like to believe ourselves surrounded by waters isolated from the world outside. We like to think ourselves individuals, the center of our own solar systems — centered yet separated by time and space from mothers, wives, children and friends who dip into our orbit for a time only to swing away again.

It is easy to feel alone.

It is easy to think that our actions do not shatter the mirrored water that flows around us, yet the decisions we make ripple out into the world.

We see it in politics, where the temptation is to live and let live, assuming no responsibility for the community, the state, the nation or the world.

I hear it all the time. I'll take care of myself, do what I want, and it won't affect anyone else. If other people make bad choices, can't access health care or mental health services or run out of money when they are too old to work, that's their problem. It won't affect me.

Yet it does. I work as a nurse in an emergency room. It is the front line of the consequences of bad choices.

I meet a lot of people who until that moment thought they were islands. I have met many people who thought their decisions affected



Ed Hunt/For The Daily Astorian

The U.S. Geological Survey named this islet in Washington's Willapa Bay "Round Island," back in 1858, but locals call it Baby Island.

no one but them and them alone. Some have long suffering loved ones at bedside, others have long since burned those bridges to the mainland. Perhaps they justified this as a way to limit that damage they caused, or perhaps the connection was never very good in the first place.

If not family and friends, there are always the professionals — the police officers, emergency medical technicians, nurses, doctors and social workers — who crash in waves trying to make a difference until the last breath.

Every wave recedes taking a little away from the beach and leaving a little of itself behind. Yet, the ocean itself is not unchanged.

I have watched as addiction destroys families and devastates public resources. I have seen suicide shatter communities. I have seen health care professionals struggle to make a difference in the face of increasing needs and decreasing resources.

Studies have shown that nurses experience depression at twice the rate of the general population. Doctors have a suicide rate that is at least twice that of the general population and that rate is even greater for female physicians. The stresses come from long hours, increasing work loads and the crushing expectations of health care systems that are always demanding more and paying less.

## Writer's Notebook

**'How we treat each other and how we take care of ourselves matters. If you think you are an island, just wait until low tide.'**

Unfortunately, few seek professional help.

So too some of the stress comes from our own expectations. Physician Pranay Sinha, in a 2014 essay titled "Why Do Doctors Commit Suicide?" in *The New York Times* explained it this way:

"There is a strange machismo that pervades medicine. Doctors, especially fledgling doctors like me, feel the need to project intellectually, emotional and physical prowess beyond what we truly possess. We masquerade as strong and untroubled professionals even in our darkest and most self-doubting moments. How, then, are we supposed to identify colleagues in trouble — or admit that we need help ourselves?"

Individual strength, resilience and freedom are cultural virtues in our nation. Yet we achieve most when we come together and recognize our connections and that through those connections our individual decisions have repercussions on the world around us.

This far north the tides are impressive — a dozen feet in sea level change can drastically alter your perspective in a few hours time. When the tide is low, the water drains out of old Shoalwater Bay and Round Island is exposed as connected to mainland by mudflats that the unwary may be tempted to walk across.

Take away the oceans that appear to separate us, and you will find underneath the connections that tie us all together. What we do and say and act affects those near and far.

How we treat each other and how we take care of ourselves matters.

If you think you are an island, just wait until low tide.

*Ed Hunt is a writer and registered nurse who blogs on medical issues at redtriage.com and on other subjects at theebbtide.blogspot.com. He lives in Grays River, Washington.*

## Open forum

### Blown away by art

Recently my school had the honor to spend some time with artists from the community. The artist I went to see was Sara Ruscetta. She showed us her amazing chainsaw skills.

She told us how much time and work goes into just one wood project. Mind blowing to me. The little tree she made for us was cool, and I thought that it would be maybe one

more hour to wrap it up. No, I was very wrong. The little tree she started is going to take eight more hours to finish.

Sara Ruscetta also showed us how many saws she uses, and how they help her with her projects. At the end of our workshop, I was blown away by the amount of time and work that goes into chainsaw projects.

I am looking forward to next

year's Honorary Artists of Oregon Day, and hope to see more artists next time.

TANNER RICH  
Seaside

### Creative kudos

On April 14, Seaside High School observed the Honorary Artists of Oregon Day by having workshops for students led by professional artists.

One of our students helped create this new tradition for all of Oregon. The state passed HB3042 to inspire students' creativity.

On that day, I observed a professional cartoon/portrait artist, Dave Poole, draw a portrait of a person from our group. I found his drawing workshop interesting. Also, we were able to ask him some questions. Finally, I have learned some drawing skills.

I would like to thank the people who put the event together, the artists and the state legislators who passed the bill.

BENNY OLSON  
Seaside

**Editor's note:** These letters were among several from students about Honorary Artists of Oregon Day on April 14 collected by Seaside High School teacher Tina Hess.



**THE DAILY ASTORIAN**

Founded in 1873

STEPHEN A. FORRESTER, Editor & Publisher • LAURA SELLERS, Managing Editor  
BETTY SMITH, Advertising Manager • CARL EARL, Systems Manager  
JOHN D. BRUIJN, Production Manager • DEBRA BLOOM, Business Manager  
HEATHER RAMSDELL, Circulation Manager