

# ANY PLANET WITH WILD STRAWBERRIES IS A WORLD OF

# MAGIC

**W**aking at dawn to freezing straight-down rain when only a week before local rivers were weakly wiggling toward an early destructive drought, I thought of my grandmother's incantation.

At age 7 or so, I got into trouble with Mom.

She asked why, when we were left overnight with her parents, my little brother steadfastly refused to give Grandma a goodnight kiss. I said maybe it was because Grandma was so very wrinkly.

Oh boy. Not the right thing to say. "I was just spec-a-lating!" Talking fast, I assured her that we both dearly loved Grandma, wrinkles and all.

Grandma was powerful in ways maybe only old women and young children can be, free from the restraints of self-consciousness and rational explanations. She was a wise woman in both the ancient and modern senses — a kindly witch and a smart old lady buoyed by optimistic confidence in the mysterious powers that still reside deep in the tendrils of willow roots and the bubbles in pure spring water.



**Matt Winters**

It is magic that vanishes the split instant anybody notices or tries to tame it.

Once in our arid mountain valley, Grandma breathed an avid hope for "a good all-night rain." Out of nothingness, clouds banded together from a clear sky and began wringing themselves out by midnight, sending a deluge that uprooted house-sized rocks that last budged when the glaciers were alive. I can still hear their voices as they pressed past one another in the Popo Agie River, granite grinding against granite like sumo wrestlers thirsty for a barrel of beer.

If that's not magic, what is?

Cynicism is to magic what rock salt is to a garden — long-lasting poison. Intellectual snobbery, not science, is the enemy of magic. My life is made richer by belief that Grandma could set in motion an epic rainstorm by breathing her hope into the expectant air. What pathetic wretch will tell me otherwise? As Mark Twain observed, faith is believing what you know ain't so.

### Wild berry time

Another kind of magic is stirring in the dune grass and forest clearings of the outer coast this mid-June. It is the enchantment of sweet berries, perhaps brought to early fruit by the prayers of bears.

Grandma used to note randomly



Photo Courtesy of Lee Knott

**Atlas Knott practices the natural wizardry of boys by conjuring up a handful of precious wild strawberries during the Sea School Cooperative's weekly foraging expedition, Wednesdays at 1 p.m.**

selected events like gardening milestones, weasel sightings, first snows and family birthdays on the pages of gaudy paper calendars she hung on a nail above the white enamel chest-freezer on her "back porch." In practicality, it was the entryway everyone actually used. A black iron bell was suspended outside that we many grandsons delighted in ringing to announce our presence (except between the hours of 1 and 3 p.m., when we knew she was napping). If we still had her calendars, there's a chance I could tell you on what date her plum thicket began blooming in 1967.

Though I'm no more methodical about record-keeping than she was, in 2012 when I last noted the ripening of the little wild blackberries, they weren't abundant until around the first or second week in July. On Aug. 7, I wrote "the first finishers arrived a month ago, deceptively dark but shy of sugar. A wise old home species, they appreciate the urgency of completely utilizing every halfway decent day here on Bad-Weather Beach. For the past 10 days, they've mostly been sweet as kisses. Like a high-school romance, the fact the end's so near makes them all the more delicious. In a process reminiscent of the 1960s board game 'Operation,' I make my hand small

as possible and snake it through gaps in the prickly-covered vines, braced for the electrical shock of a thorn penetrating to a nerve. Fishing out about six berries at a time makes a mouthful."

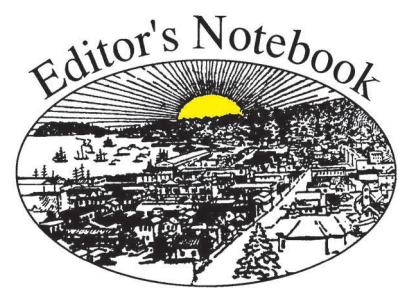
Last Wednesday evening, June 15, I ate deliciously early blackberries while walking Duncan in a foggy glade above the ocean. I returned from our walk looking like I just voted in an Arab election, right thumb and fingers dyed bright reddish purple. Wild blackberries are all-too-easily crushed but, wow, what a taste detonation.

Salmon berries also are reaching full abundance just now, but are my least favorite. They ordinarily have a watery, washed-out flavor in keeping with their anemic pink-tinged yellow color. Thimble berries — which remind me of a variety of tart dime-store candy from boyhood — are getting there, but still maybe a month away from eating.

### Sharp-eyed boys

Very best of all are wild strawberries, which my old Peterson Field Guide says "possess a flavor and sweetness not equaled by the cultivated varieties." Seldom larger than a pea, they prove the entire universe is good.

Heavenly, and healing, too. "Indians not only utilized the berries but made a



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tealike beverage from the leaves," the field guide says. This tea — along with that made from wild blackberry leaves — is a well-known folk remedy for diarrhea. In addition, "The Quileute chewed the leaves and applied them as a poultice on burns," according to Pojar and MacKinnon.

Although wild strawberry vines are prolific along parts of my customary path down to the Pacific, until this month I was sure they either never fruited here or were gobbled by wildlife the moment they became edible. The Haida are supposed to have noticed the wholesale disappearance of strawberries after deer were introduced to the Queen Charlotte Islands. Washington's Cape Disappointment has tame deer aplenty, and it's easy to imagine the devils delicately nibbling every last berry just before I stride into view.

However, Atlas Knott of the Long Beach Peninsula now has me pondering a different reality: You have to be a child to consistently find wild strawberries. Better eyesight, closer to the ground, or just maybe a special kind of boyhood magic. When his mom posted Atlas' photo on Facebook with a whole handful of coastal strawberries, I figured maybe I'd better try to recollect what it's like to be an observant boy.

Sure enough, the secret is stopping long enough and genuinely looking, with a renewed expectation of succeeding. I was rewarded with my first wild strawberries since I was about Atlas' age.

There were just three — not even a meal for a mouse — but they somersaulted me back to a long-ago day in a remote river gorge, the summer sun filtered by quaking aspen leaves. I was the "finder," the boy with sharp eyes. The "Luck of the Matt," my mom used to call it. Those berries were the best dessert of my life, gobbled down before a lunch of chicken fried over an open campfire.

Any planet with wild strawberries is a world of magic.

—M.S.W.

Matt Winters is editor and publisher of the *Chinook Observer* and *Coast River Business Journal*.

## In Trump's America, a pistol for every bar stool

By GAIL COLLINS

New York Times News Service

The nation hasn't exactly joined hands in a united response to the Orlando massacre.

But since this terrible mass shooting happened in one of the most weapons-friendly places in the country, maybe we can at least all agree that having wildly permissive gun laws does not make a city safer.

OK, probably not.

On Wednesday, Donald Trump took time out from vilifying Muslims and put some of the blame on gun control. If the patrons of Pulse, the gay bar in Orlando, had been carrying concealed weapons, he said, they could have taken control of the situation. The gunman would have been "just open target practice."

(This was at the same speech where he congratulated himself for his stupendous relationship with the gay community, suggesting he didn't "get enough credit" for having a club in

Palm Beach that was "open to everybody." This is a little off our topic today, but I have to once again point out that Trump's club is open to everybody with \$100,000 to cover the membership fee.)

But about guns. Let's follow Trump's thought. It's easy to buy a gun in Florida and supereasy to get a permit to carry around a concealed weapon. Even the Florida Legislature, however, doesn't allow people to carry guns into bars. Trump did not specifically say that we need to uphold Americans' freedom to drink while armed. But there doesn't seem to be any other way to interpret his argument.

Also, there actually was an off-duty police officer working in the club who tried to shoot the gunman but failed. This is important, because the myth of the cool and steady shooter is one of the most cherished beliefs of the National Rifle Association and its supporters. Trump himself has bragged that if he'd been in Paris on the night of the attacks



**Gail Collins**

there, he would have shot the terrorists. ("I may have been killed, but I would have drawn.")

This is an excellent example of delusional gun thinking. Although Trump frequently reminds us he has a permit to carry a gun, there's no indication he's ever done so. And there's certainly no evidence whatsoever that he has any skill in hitting things.

It's very, very difficult to draw, aim and shoot accurately when you're under severe stress. It's one of the reasons that police officers so often spray fleeing suspects with bullets. They can't hit a moving target, even though they get far more weapons training than your normal armed civilian.

In Florida, people who want to carry a gun merely have to be able to demonstrate they can "safely handle and discharge the firearm." Nowhere does it say anything about accuracy.

A few weeks ago in Houston, a 25-year-old Afghanistan War veteran

named Dionisio Garza walked up to a stranger sitting in a car at a carwash and shot him in the neck while railing about "homosexuals, Jews and Walmart," according to local reports. He fired off 212 rounds, mostly from an assault rifle, hitting a police helicopter and a nearby gas station, which burst into flames. The police said a neighbor who heard the shooting came running with a gun, but was shot himself.

People who hear this story may draw different morals. The way we've been going, it'll be a miracle if some member of the Texas Legislature doesn't submit a bill requiring employees of carwashes to be armed at all times. However, others might note that the weapon in this case was an AR-15, the same type of military-style rifle that was used in the Orlando shooting, the Newtown school shooting and the terrorist attack in San Bernardino. It would seem as if the best way to cut down on mass shootings would be by eliminating weapons that allow crazy people to rapidly fire off endless rounds of bullets.

The possibility of banning assault

weapons like the AR-15 is most definitely not on the table in Congress, although Hillary Clinton supports it, and has brought it up a lot since Orlando. No, the current debate in Washington is over whether people on the government's terror watch list should be kept from purchasing arms.

The fact that even people who aren't allowed to get on a plane can buy a gun in this country is obviously insane. Yet most of the Republicans in the House and the Senate regard changing the status quo as an enormous lift. "I think you're going too far here," Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina told the backers during one of the bill's pathetic trips to nowhere.

Since the Orlando shooter had actually spent some time on the terror watch list, the pressure seems to be growing. Trump says he'll meet with the NRA to talk over the matter. Perhaps, after all this time, we'll get some pathetically minor action. Then only political maniacs would have the opportunity to buy guns that can take out a roomful of people in no time flat.



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