



The Lady Washington

SETTING SAIL IN A NEW LIFE DIRECTION

Writer's Notebook

First of Two Parts

By JULIE BROWN
For The Daily Astorian

I'd been traveling for 12 hours to get from Astoria to Morro Bay, California, and I was tired.

I partially dragged the heavy duffel bag a friend had loaned me and was trying to juggle that with my carry-on bag full of books, a pillow, and a sleeping bag that had come unrolled and was trailing on the sidewalk behind me.



Julie Brown

It was one last mile from the bus station to the harbor and there wasn't a taxi in sight. People were looking at me like I was a homeless woman.

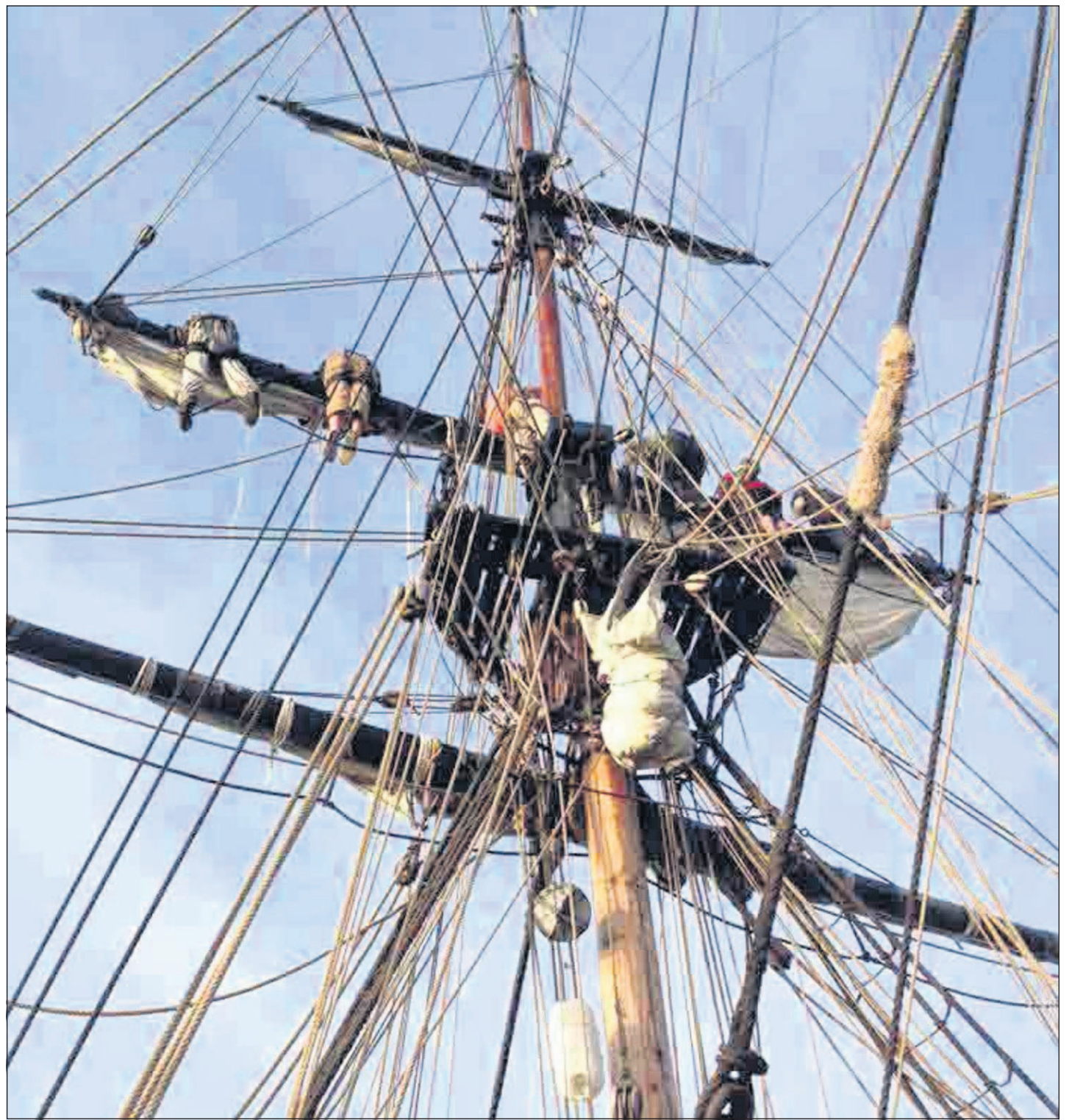
I finally reached the harbor and there she was: a beautiful tall ship gently rocking in the sunny breeze, masts as tall as the old-growth firs they were made from, sails bleached white from sun and salt water. I recognized the smiling face of Martha Washington carved at the bow.

The Lady Washington is a replica of a historical trading vessel that sailed 200 years ago, carrying furs and tea and silks to various ports. This crew was milling about in 18th century breeches and waistcoats, some on deck, some aloft in the rigging. I stepped aboard and introduced myself as the new deckhand-in-training. At 54, I was the same age as the captain, old enough to be everyone else's mother.

I have been an English professor at Clatsop Community College for many years. I live in a world of books and ideas, grammar and spelling and student research projects. I have always been more at home in a library than at the beach. And yet something had compelled me to try this new adventure, to test myself in a way I had never been tested before. So I signed up for the "Two Weeks before the Mast" training program aboard the Lady Washington.

"Stow your gear in the focsle!" someone yelled. "Somebody get her some funnies and get her into a harness!" Funnies are the 18th-century sailor clothes that the crew wears on the Lady when members of the public are touring the ship. I was given knee breeches, a piratey-looking blouse with gorgeous puffy sleeves, and a long vest with buckles and brass buttons.

After I dressed (in the galley, I soon learned there was no privacy at all on board), I was assigned to a group of 15 children who were gathered near the bow of the ship, learning about the life of a sailor. Someone was explaining to them about life at sea: how precious drinking water was, how fresh food only lasted the first week and then the crew was given hard-as-nails sea biscuits to eat, how entertainment in those days consisted of sing-



Photos by Julie Brown/For The Daily Astorian

Shipmates hanging on the yardarms unfurling the sails.

ing and playing cards and learning knots and carving scrimshaw. The kids were enthralled, and so was I.

Aft on the quarterdeck, another group of children were learning about navigation. These fourth-graders all had GPS in their phones and could find their way to China, but were now learning what a chart looked like, and how ships found their course before modern technology came along. How a chip line with knots in it was thrown overboard to calculate the ship's speed. How a lead line was dropped overboard to measure the depth and bring up particles from the sea floor (sand, gravel), which could then be analyzed. How sailors judged their position by looking at the sun, moon and stars. History was coming alive for them.

After the children disembarked, it was time for us to quickly set sail for our next port. I had only been on the ship for about four hours, yet soon found myself preparing to "lay aloft," something I didn't expect would happen on

my first day. The chief mate strapped me into a parachute-type harness that wound around my waist and hips.

I hadn't even unpacked my bags yet, and I was already following a group of 20-some-things over the side of the ship to the ratlines (rope ladders) that stretched up 89 feet from the deck rail to the top of the foremast. If I thought I was going to fall, the mate explained, it was better to fall into the water than onto the deck.

I am not afraid of heights. I am not afraid of water. But I am afraid of dying. To conquer this fear, my strategy was to keep my eyes straight in front of me. I would not look up — or down. Right foot. Left foot. Right foot. Left foot.

Eventually I made it up to the first yardarm. With trembling hands I hooked my harness into a safety cable and edged my way out toward the port side, out over the water. Little more. Little more. Keep my eyes in front of me at all times. Little more, little more.

When I had reached the very outer end of the yardarm, the bosun gave me instructions — we needed to untie the ribbon-like gaskets

that were keeping the sail furled up. We had to do this without getting the gaskets tangled up in the sail or in our harnesses. We had to keep one arm around the yardarm while doing this, hanging out over the water and bobbing up and down. Three of us worked together on the Main Course sail.

Finally the sail was free, and it dropped down beautifully and curtsied in the breeze. Rather than follow my shipmates higher up to the main topsail, I decided I needed to get my feet back on deck. Look straight ahead. Left foot. Right foot. Back on deck, I started to breathe again.

Monday, in Part II, more about life on the ship.

Julie Brown teaches writing, literature and maritime culture at Clatsop Community College. She enjoys fishing and clam digging and was a co-founder of the Fisher Poets Gathering. This summer she will be a volunteer deckhand on the Lady Washington as it sails through the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

Open forum

Equality

I've been working on my family history for nearly 30 years. I asked my aunts to write about a trip they had taken to England and the Isle of Man, and our family genealogy. This is the first paragraph of said document, written in 1994 by Delsie Reid. As I was reading through our history book today, I thought this applies to the world today:

"When one starts to write a family history, it seems that he or she should start at the beginning. But when or where was the beginning?"

"The Bible says that 'in the beginning was God,' and he created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, with instructions to multiply. So aren't we all descendants of

the original family? Regardless of race, color, religion or social standards? And, aren't we all equal in the eyes of God? I believe that we are."

BRENDA KAY HOXSEY
Warrenton

Torture not funny

To the people of Cannon Beach: Recently I visited your city. Although there is, in general, a welcoming atmosphere I had an unfortunate experience in the parking lot of one of the city's restaurants. I am hopeful you will see it as a serious matter you need to confront if it continues in your midst.

There was a car in the parking lot with two signs on it. One, on

the bumper, only presents a problem of civility. It said "Up yours Hillary Clinton." The other was different: it said "I love waterboarding." That required a response, so I wrote a brief note, but he was gone before I could give it to him, or leave it on his car.

This is the note, and I hope it will produce some thoughtful consideration in the Cannon Beach community. The note read as follows:

I stand in awe, and I am humbled. I did not know anyone could display such malicious ignorance. Your lack of civility undermines what so many have sacrificed in our courts, and on battlefields to secure for all of us. When waterboarding becomes "due process of law," we sink to the

level of the very totalitarians we have faced so often. You might read the Bill of Rights as a place to begin your education.

THOMAS D. MORRIS
Portland

Safe and fair

In the July 14 edition of *The Daily Astorian*, there was an article about the Astoria Police Department having their periodic pedestrian safety program, where drivers will get cited for not yielding to pedestrians ("Astoria Police to join pedestrian safety enforcement program"). So far, so good.

For a fair and balanced approach, I request they devote the same

energy to walkers for a similar time frame. Jaywalking in the middle of a block seems to be a local sporting event. Pedestrians walking against the "don't walk" light when cars are attempting to turn or proceed seems to be a game of chance, with prizes for the winners.

How about a few citations for the bicycles running down the downtown sidewalks, putting the city at risk of a lawsuit for injuring the pedestrians we are trying to protect? Lastly, a good big ticket for the guys I see frequently roaring down the middle of Eighth Street on skateboards.

We can all be safer when everyone follows the rules of the road.

MIKE GREEN
Astoria



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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