

# Bissinger: ‘I feel there is a great story to be told in Astoria’

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## ‘The right hook’

Washington. It was early in the year.

“I remember there was no sun,” Bissinger said. “It wasn’t pouring rain, it was just sort of spitting rain. And it was the kind of place that just seemed really, really cold.”

As they moved toward the roiling Pacific Ocean, he asked Smith, “How many nice days do you get out here?” And Lisa said, “What, are you kidding? This is a nice day!”

After a walk along the beach, which they had all to themselves, they drove to Astoria, he said. It was the first time he had ever been in Oregon, and crossed the Astoria Bridge.

“I’m not saying this to please any of you,” he told the audience. “For my money, it is the greatest bridge in America.”

When he drives on it, he feels like he’s on top of the Columbia River, gliding across it, before taking the high arc that reveals the hills of Astoria. “I did feel like I was entering another world. I really did. I had never seen a place like this.”

His heartbeat quickened. He was mesmerized. The town had become a new-found source of excitement and intrigue: “The Columbia, the hills, the ocean, all of it — the lore, the legacy, Lewis and Clark, the Graveyard of the Pacific.”

“You could tell right then and there — and I felt it — it was embedded with something magnificent, something that was singular, something that I think is the most valuable quality of all if we can do it,” he said. “It was utterly authentic. Totally authentic.”

As they drove through and drank in the sights of the historic community, they also noticed: “All the men had very long beards, and even though it was raining really hard at this point, no one carried an umbrella, no one wore a raincoat, no one had any hats on,” he said, “as if it wasn’t raining at all — like, ‘What’s your problem?’”

He and Lisa didn’t stay long. And, for all Bissinger knew, he would never be back. “But the great thing about life is that you just never know,” he said.

Eventually, they purchased a tiny getaway cottage in Seaview and, later, a house in Long Beach after selling their home in Philadelphia.

Astoria, he learned, had seen better days. The famous waterfront canneries had shut down. The city was no longer as alive with fishing and shipping and logging.

But now, when he crosses the Astoria Bridge and catches the hills of the city, he sees “a town that has completely transformed, that has completely rejuvenated, that has put on a new coat of clothing but has not lost its authenticity.”

He credits this to people in the community who are committed to upholding the town’s integrity, that have made it both an arts showcase and a place for artists to live and thrive.

The town does have problems, many of them upshots of success, he pointed out — a lack of housing that Astoria’s workers can afford, for example.

“As a place grows and prospers, as Astoria has done, so do prices, often to the detriment of those who truly live here.”

He offered a warning: “And so, Astoria, as it grows, you cannot sell your soul out to the vacationers, ’cause I’ve seen that happen, and that can be devastating.”

His journalist’s eyes, seasoned with more than 40 years of a consciously bearing witness, remain trained on Astoria’s unfolding narrative.

“I continue to do in Astoria — I continue to do in the Northwest — what I’ve done all my life as a writer: I observe it. I get excited by it. I do feel that kind of wonderful and profound stimulation,” he said. “And I do wonder at the stories that are here to be told. I feel there is a great story to be told in Astoria, if you can find the right hook.”



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Jennifer and Micha Cameron-Lattek took over Street 14 Cafe in downtown Astoria, expanding into a seasonal weekend dinner service in 2015. Street 14 will expand its lunch menu and try to hold prix fixe dinners at least once a month.

# Cafe: Chef and his wife are launching a prepped ‘meal kit’ delivery service in May

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“Me and my wife are going to be starting a meal kit, kind of like Blue Apron mixed with” community-supported agriculture, Catalano said of his and Sarah Cobb’s new venture.

Alimento — Italian for sustenance — will deliver prepped kits of about three meals a week for two to four people. Catalano said the couple plans to launch the service in May, shortly after he leaves Street 14.

“They will be recipes that will be similar to what I was making at Street 14,” but with a simpler preparation, Catalano said. “I hope to also include a lot of the food preparation directions I’ve become known for.”

## Dinner nights

Catalano said he was already a regular at Street 14 when he and the Cameron-Latteks connected in late 2014 and hatched the dinner service they started in October 2015.

“With our expansion, and having put in a full kitchen, we felt like it was something we wanted to try out,” said Jennifer Cameron-Lattek.

Catalano said he was working part time at a few different places to get the lay of the



Dwight Caswell/For The Daily Astorian

Chef Andrew Catalano headed Street 14 Cafe’s weekend dinner service, which the cafe started in late 2015 and ended last weekend.

local culinary scene. The Cameron-Latteks gave him relative carte blanche to assess what local foods were available by

each Wednesday, before creating a dinner menu for the coming weekend.

For Catalano, who started cooking commercially 15 years ago while working on organic farms in Italy, it was a perfect fit. “That’s the only way I really know how to cook, is to see what we have access to at a given moment, what’s beautiful and fresh, and go from there,” he said.

After cutting his teeth in Italy and at fine-dining restaurants in New York before moving to Oregon, Catalano quickly built a reputation for expertly executing locally sourced dishes. In 2016, he won Coast Weekend Readers’ Choice Chef of the Year.

Jennifer Cameron-Lattek said the dinners had a dedicated following of return customers, albeit a smaller one. “We just weren’t able to reach the

amount of people we needed to keep it going,” she said.

## The future

She said Street 14 will expand its lunch menu and try to hold prix fixe dinners — several courses at a fixed price — at least once a month, along with guest chef nights.

“I’m excited for Andy’s new adventure,” she said. “I’m really glad that there’s still going to be an outlet for the producers we worked with.”

Catalano said he and Cobb have long wanted to start a restaurant in the same vein of Street 14, which provided him a test run.

“I hope that I’ve kind of given consumers another option for how to eat out, and for what a restaurant should be,” he said. “I think it should be something that celebrates the place. I think every plate of food you eat should have a sense of place.”

# Farewell: ‘He got along with everybody’

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“What mischief was behind his smile?” his friend Jimmy Beckwith asked in a series of rhetorical questions. “Did the twinkle in his eyes hold the same magic in your heart as it did in mine? Was his world always full of friends who brought a smile to his face? Who will honor his memory?”

“We will!” someone yelled as the audience applauded.

The fact that the memorial was held on April Fools’ Day was not lost on those who knew Boudreau, who was known in part for his sarcastic sense of humor.

“He would have loved that,” Starr Boudreau said.

Boudreau had four sib-

lings, including three brothers who died previously. His sister, Jeanne Tucker, recalls nights during their childhood when her brother would crawl into bed with her and read a story.

“He was always my pet. He would follow me to school if he could,” Tucker said. “He was good for everybody. He got along with everybody.”

Boudreau worked at a number of canneries in the area. In his free time, he enjoyed playing music and riding his bike.

Mary Todd, the bar’s owner, was friends with Boudreau since high school. His last stop at the bar was two weeks before his death, but he was a regu-



Ronald Boudreau

lar customer since its opening 26 years ago.

“He was totally a part of this place,” Todd said.

A memorial of his drum sticks, hard hat and harmonica will adorn the bar’s east wall. It will hang near a similar one for his brother, Roger.

Todd also will likely carve his name into a bench behind the bar where Boudreau would sleep when he didn’t want to make the trip home on a given night. Soon after revealing her plans for the bench, she lamented the circumstances surrounding her friend’s death.

“I wish he slept on my bench that night,” she said.

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