



LEFT: Workers navigate scaffolding underneath the Astoria Bridge as repairs which began in 2009 continue to be made to the structure. MIDDLE: Jesse Trott, with the Haystack Rock Awareness Program in Cannon Beach, is just one of a group of volunteers who spend time providing information to visitors about how to responsibly admire the iconic location. RIGHT: Joe Sheamos makes repairs to boat parts at West Coast Propeller Service in Warrenton.

Workplaces change, but labor makes the world go 'round

When Labor Day was born in 1883, the holiday was a big deal for workers. And that was an America rife with large factories and their assembly lines. In ways we can hardly imagine, industrialists including Henry Ford and Thomas Edison introduced innovations and new techniques that transformed an essentially agrarian society into an urban one.

Compare old photographs of workers from a century ago with people today and it becomes apparent that Americans ourselves have changed in amazing ways, growing both upward and in circumference. Today, even the poorest among us are better fed and far more advantaged than average citizens were at the start of the modern labor movement.

Positive changes don't occur spontaneously. Individual men and women, working with intelligence and tenacity, deserve our gratitude for incrementally making the United States a nation which, for all its flaws, is still the wonder of our age. Last year's contentious election, whatever one thinks of the outcome, brought a sharp focus on problems faced by working Americans and the ways in which we need to renew our commitments to ensuring decent pay for decent work.

While all manner of things have changed, the idea of honoring labor remains an honorable aspect of this nation. Ultimately, those toiling in anonymity are

far more worthy of our thanks than the famous captains of industry. Our families exist because of the labor of our parents and grandparents.

Here on the Lower Columbia River, the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union was perhaps the most visible of several active organizations that struggled to level the scales of economic and political power on behalf of laborers. It wasn't unusual for multiple men to die each season in the small, open fishing boats of that era. Meanwhile, fishermen vied with salmon packers over a penny or two per pound for the big Chinook that were the foundation of our economy.

The power of local companies and workers ebbed and flowed over the years. In bad times like the 1930s, many companies failed and the jobs they provided disappeared. Firms that survived were often the ones with the best long-term partnerships with fishermen and canning workers. These companies looked after employees and their employees returned the favor.

This collaboration between labor and capital in bringing about success is still robust in places like the communities of the Lower Columbia. The owners of companies on the scale that prosper here understand that good workers are absolutely indispensable. And workers here are close enough to the front lines of capitalism to

seldom take their jobs for granted.

These partnerships between employers and employees are at risk in the giant corporations that wield so much power in the nation beyond our cherished coast. The thought of companies transferring their real or symbolic headquarters to foreign nations in order to deprive the U.S. of tax revenue should revolt us all. Citizenship — whether by individuals or corporations — is a two-way street. Those who prosper thanks to the advantages created by our great nation must in turn be willing to help pay for it. Corporations that enjoy the protections of American laws, shouldn't wiggle out of tax obligations by moving their symbolic legal residence to another nation. President Donald Trump and other leaders are right to speak out about the need for better corporate citizenship — but must match meaningful actions with their stirring rhetoric.

Our economy has been transformed in recent decades. Economic recovery has been uneven, delivering far more wealth to a few, while most Americans work within the context of a globalized labor market that tends to keep wages down. This has created feelings of anger and insecurity that were greatly reflected in last year's presidential politics. Now, we must take steps to address these concerns. Even so, working conditions and job fairness are a quantum leap better than they

were in our grandparents' time. All Americans living today still benefit from the transformations in labor laws and attitudes that came to permeate 20th-century society.

Although you don't have to look far to uncover derogatory attitudes toward unions, the fair-employment initiatives that were led by organized labor groups are key to everything from minimum wages, bars on child labor, safe working conditions, employer-provided health insurance and a host of other things we take for granted.

In good times, some Americans consider labor rights and organizations to be sort of expensive extravagances. But even as the overall economy continues to improve, it still behooves Americans and our leaders to empower labor in ways that ensure future economic health, and a balance of power between corporations and everyday citizens.

Families struggle to pay for the education children require for the technologically demanding jobs of the future. Health care, once one of the near-certainties of middle-class employment, remains a source of worry. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, personal financial well-being still seems less secure than it was half a century ago. For these reasons and more, it's important we always pay attention to the details of working life.

The victories of the past can leak away when we're not watching.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Traveling is easy, escaping is hard

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

Folks love to remember the words of former Mayor Don Larson, who shaped the tone and tenor of Seaside during his long and productive time in city government. A "Don Larson meeting," for example, is a city meeting run with efficiency and timeliness, without the baggage and verbiage some cities endure.

I remember the former mayor commenting that although he loved Seaside's events — Hood to Coast, the beach volleyball championship — the crowds here in Seaside set his vacation time in motion. I can relate.

After settling in Seaside this spring, I saw firsthand the transition the city takes when June turns the corner into July and visitors swell the city's streets and fill the local eateries. A confluence of events — including the 90th birthday of my father — took me out of Seaside for my summer vacation, a vacation bookended by national, local and planetary events.

I arrived in Saugatuck, Michigan, a little tourist town on the eastern side of Lake Michigan, as events in Charlottesville, Virginia, were unfolding. My father, a longtime civil rights activist, was surprisingly calm as we shuffled from the news channels — CNN, MSNBC, Fox — and watched the hate unfold, culminating in the violent death of Weather Heyer. I think I was more worked up about it — he a veteran of the March on Washington for Jobs and Free-



dom in August 1963 and at the side of Martin Luther King Jr. again in Selma, Alabama, in 1965.

My father was immersed in a book on the French Revolution and as the latest words of our president wound up my internal coil of outrage, I was surprised by his relative calm. "People shouldn't be surprised," he said, only barely raising his eyes above the top of his book. "They knew what they were getting."

Juggling act

After a bit of pique, I decided to follow his lead and enjoy the vacation, which with every political turn seemed to be more and more of a juggling act. My most recent Seaside Signal piece showcased Seaside's newest entertainment venue, the Inverted Experience, subtly influencing me to feel that the world right now is somewhat upside down. Even the beach book

I had chosen, "Submission," by Michel Houellebecq, was painfully intense and profoundly political, a dark comedy about a world where the Muslim Brotherhood accede to power in contemporary France.

Yet vacation time it was and time to soldier on. Fortunately, Saugatuck — a sort of amalgam of beach tourist communities from Cape Cod to Cannon Beach, with a heavy emphasis on weekenders from Chicago — offered the perfect respite, in fact, one of the local coffee bars in nearby Douglas was called Respite. Acclimating myself to humid summer clime for the first time since my debarquement on the Oregon Coast, I put down my double shot Americano and strolled the streets, bouncing from boutiques to sandwich joints and always looking for an authentic Chicago-style hot dog. I took a riverboat with 80 of my new best friends up the Kalamazoo River to the mouth of Lake

Michigan, drinking a Leinenkugel Lemon Shandy under the beating sun. I found a hot dog place in Holland, Michigan, that served the Chicago dogs, but these couldn't hold a candle to Ruby's in Seaside or Mudd Dogs in Manzanita. Dad had the TV tuned to the Detroit Tigers games; they were dropping a series to the Rangers. Apparently they're not having much of a season.

I read the local paper, The Commercial Record, which was headlining a spat between the city government and the district fire chief over concerns from the that city officials were "subverting" his authority. In turn, officials responded: "There was no give and take on anything." And world news kept seeping in as I lingered on the deck of the Uncommon Coffee Roasters drinking Americanos and reading the Chicago Tribune and Grand Rapids Press.

Reconnecting

As family began to arrive for a celebration of Dad's 90th, I reconnected with John, an in-law and former suburban cop injured in the line of duty. He had been patrolling Highway 411 in Lake County, Illinois, and pulled over a suspect who attempted to flee. The suspect was apprehended, but not without resistance; John was to face three back surgeries, and remains on disability. After my own running accident in May, I was familiar with the pain scale. I asked John what his pain level — a scale from one to 10, with 10 being the highest — was on a day-to-day basis. Was it a two? No, he said. Four? He shook his head. Six? He nodded. I couldn't imagine living with that kind of pain on a daily basis. He blamed illegal immigrants and lax policy

for his pain — the suspect had been an undocumented immigrant. The conversation stirred some complex if controlled discussion from other visitors, including family members Bill and Susie from Charlotte, North Carolina, who had lived through riots after the shooting of 20-year-old Keith Lamont Scott was killed by a city police officer. Both the victim and the officer were black. The shooting led to two nights of increasingly violent protest. Protesters threw rocks and bottles; police deployed tear gas. Three TV reporters were assaulted, one of whom ended up hospitalized.

As in Charlottesville, the narrative becomes increasingly clouded depending on what news channel you have on. Bill urged a more nuanced view than John, but clearly no minds were going to be changed.

It was a good thing the television remained muted as we all gathered together to salute my dad. Among his guests was a 104-year-old woman: "And she came to visit me," he later said sheepishly.

I closed out my visit with some St. Louis style baby back ribs at Smokey Bones Bar & Fire Grill before setting the alarm for 4:30 a.m. to board the Delta flight from Grand Rapids to Portland, with a layover in Minneapolis.

I felt momentarily relieved — I had accomplished my mission. It hadn't been easy but I had lost myself for a week and finally turned off the cable news.

There was an eclipse here in Oregon, and with it, I knew, the sun would shine again.

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