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WEEKEND BREAK

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Aaron Breniman photos

More than 100 years after it ran aground, the Peter Iredale still stands vibrantly in Fort Stevens State Park, the jumping off point for Aaron Breniman and his mother, Susan Breniman, to explore Astoria and surrounding areas for her recent birthday.

THE GIFT OF TIME

A mother's North Coast birthday

Presents are easy. Time is meaningful. There is no better gift we can give than ourselves.

By **AARON BRENNIMAN**
For *The Daily Astorian*

For my mother's birthday last month, I realized that the most important gift I could ever give her was my time, as she had given me hers for so many years. Fully focused, attentive time.

Time is fleeting, gone like gusts of passing winds. The moments I miss most, I find, are the moments I will never get back.

I've lately chosen to be more intentional with my time. I've prioritized what matters, and spending time with family and loved ones has been at the top of that list. I've had many long meals and long hours of conversations with friends old and new, with family near and far. I've connected deeply.

I recently took my dad camping, in the rain. We fished. We talked family history. We cooked trout over a fire.

As I age, it strikes me that I don't often realize my parents are aging as well. Nobody expects their parents to



Jeff Anderson's "Salmon in the Trees" along the Willapa Interpretive Art Trail, one of many installations celebrating the fish's importance to the region's ecosystem and heritage at the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge.

live forever, but in our day-to-day lives we often don't appreciate how many occasions to spend time with them are lost.

For her birthday, my mother, Susan Breniman, and I headed down to Astoria for a couple of days to spend time together, and found casually exploring Astoria and surrounding areas to be full of opportunities for conversation, discovery, shopping and indulging.

There won't always be tomorrows
We visited the remnants of the Peter

Iredale — the barque steel sailing vessel that ran aground in October 1906 in what is now Fort Stevens State Park — arriving on a blustery Sunday afternoon to empty, sand-blown parking lots. We talked about camping as a family when I was young. And how my brother and I enjoyed playing with and eating slugs.

From there, we headed into town to check into the Astoria Crest Motel, which I'd chosen for its sweeping views overlooking the area. Quite pleased with the accommodations, we unloaded a few things and headed

down for dinner at Buoy Beer at the recommendation of the woman working the front desk.

On this sleepy, off-season Sunday night, we lucked out and caught pub songs and sea shanties by Washington's Trevor Hanson on his 'multi-state' tour — a show both entertaining and great background for more conversation.

The next morning, one could have thought it was mid-spring or a late fall morning with warm temps and clear skies. But, as with any weather on the coast, just give it a few minutes and it can change.

We headed up the Astoria Column for more views, photography, simple quiet time together and reflection. The Column, dedicated in 1926, was the "crowning monument" in Great Northern Railroad President Ralph Budd's "pet project" celebrating early settlers' expansion to the Pacific Coast.

We made our way through winding country roads about 25 miles north of the Astoria Bridge to explore the Willapa Bay Wildlife Refuge. Here we walked the Willapa Art Trail, checked out the many natural art interpretations, wandered the grounds and talked about life. For there won't always be tomorrows for those conversations.

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Dramatic skies and sweeping views this fall morning of the Columbia River and Astoria Bridge from the Astoria Crest Motel, a hidden gem high up on the hill just off Old Highway 30