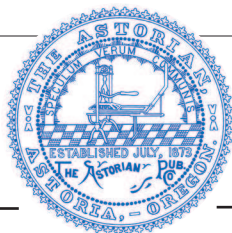


OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Astoria Warehousing loss will be deeply felt

The large metal buildings at 70 West Marine Drive have roots that reach into the heyday of Astoria's salmon packing industry, starting with the Elmore Cannery in 1881. In the postwar years, American Can's name identified later structures as a vital cog in a waterfront that still buzzed with fish processing and canning.

Today the name is Astoria Warehousing and the facility is used to receive, store and label Alaska salmon — up to 72 million cans at any one time. Recently we learned that this company's corporate parent will shortly lay off 25 workers and close the facility.

The logical, expected transition is that this link to the fishing-based economy will morph into the tourism industry, as a hotel property.

At the top of the corporate chain that owns Astoria Warehousing is Cooke Aquaculture, a Canadian-based corporation recently in the news when a net

pen broke and released tens of thousands of non-native Atlantic salmon in Puget Sound.

When this newspaper asked Cooke to say something about its decision to close Astoria Warehousing, the company declined. In 2018, that is surprising corporate behavior. Crisis management experts are a staple in the corporate world. They fashion responses to difficult situations such as this. By saying nothing, Cooke insults Astorians and its own hardworking employees. Moreover, it seems to imply corporate embarrassment.

Considering recent trends on the waterfront, it's easy to imagine that Astoria Warehousing's extremely scenic site will one day be converted to a tourism-sector use. It is lamentable to lose blue-collar jobs. There will be a gap before any hospitality employment is developed — if that is indeed Cooke's endgame — and the wages may or may

not be comparable. Plus, warehousing/fish-processing skills are perhaps not a natural fit for the positions likely to be created.

Astoria has long expressed a commitment to maintaining whatever it can from the city's industrial heritage. Even though its facilities are not an architectural gem, Astoria Warehousing has been a valued contributor to our economic mix, with genuine ties to the once-flourishing activities that brought families here in the first place. It will be sad to see it go. Its employees are a tight-knit family of their own, by all accounts — longtime workers, many of whom have dedicated decades to making the enterprise work. The loss of those jobs will have a ripple effect throughout our community.

Until recently, Astoria Warehousing's parent companies were Bellevue, Washington-based Peter Pan Seafoods and Seattle-based Icicle Seafoods. Their

acquisition by Cooke is part of a trend toward consolidation in the fish industry. This pattern has been going on a long time — most notably here in 1964 when Bumble Bee Seafoods was absorbed by a multinational corporation that moved Bumble Bee's headquarters to California in 1975. As with Oregon-based Willamette Industries' 2002 hostile buy-out by Weyerhaeuser, the loss of Bumble Bee's once-strong connections to Oregon was a hard economic blow that also signaled the shredding of a generous corporate culture that gave to local charities and robustly participated in civic life.

The most commonly held attitude toward the absence of local loyalty by multinational companies is that they are beyond influence — that trying to make a positive difference in bucking these trends is like spitting into one of our sou'wester storms. There is much evidence that suggests the American people are tiring of such powerlessness.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

The schoolchildren who died in Japan's tsunami

When schools or public institutions put together a safety manual, most of the time — usually all the time — they remain on the shelf. That's fine, as long as the shelf is still standing when the Big One hits.

When an earthquake struck Japan on March 11, 2011, the staff and students of Okawa Elementary School should have been prepared. The school, on the Japanese Pacific Coast about 200 miles north of Tokyo, followed a manual that should have told students and staff what to do. The plan should have told them to evacuate to neighboring high ground, not to a field standing at sea level.



R.J. MARX

The event was one of many catastrophic moments in a day that saw homes and cities destroyed, cars swept into the sea and the catastrophic failure of the nuclear power plant in Fukushima. Roughly 18,500 people perished in the tsunami.

"Ghosts of the Tsunami: Death and Life in Japan's Disaster Zone," focuses on the lives of those who survived and those who did not.

Author Richard Lloyd Parry traces the path of parents as they painstakingly dig through remains, day after day for months and sometimes even years searching for any remnant of their child. The author follows a long and tangled web of bureaucracy designed to deflect public responsibility. And it considers the human toll in a deeply spiritual land where ghosts inhabit the landscape as surely as the living.

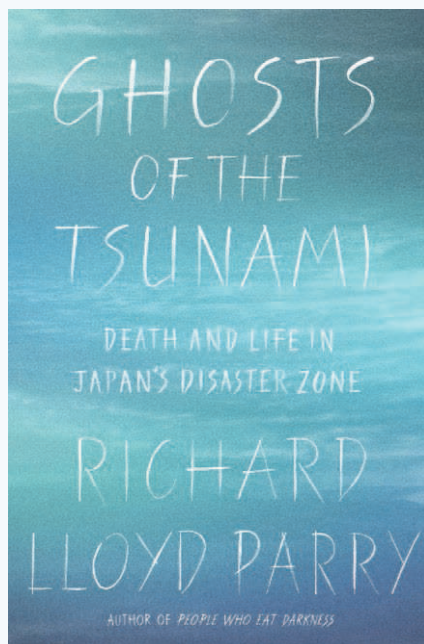
'O-tsunami'

The shaking began at 2:46 p.m. In Tokyo, where the author lived, the vibrations lasted for six minutes. "The chinking of the blinds, the buzzing of the glass, and the deep rocking motion generated an atmosphere of dreamlike unreality," Parry writes.

In Okawa, the "shaking was so strong I couldn't stand up," one mother recalled. "Even outside, crouching down, we were almost all falling over."

Electric lines swayed — "It was as if the whole world was collapsing."

Then came the tsunami warnings. While power was out, trucks drove throughout the region blasting tsunami alerts. An "O-tsunami," translated as "super tsunami," was headed toward



'Ghosts of the Tsunami'



Richard Lloyd Parry

'Ghosts of the Tsunami: Death and Life in Japan's Disaster Zone,' focuses on the lives of those who survived and those who did not.

Onagawa, a fishing port to the south.

The concrete elementary school was immediately in front of a 700-foot hill. Two hundred people, locals and children, sheltered in the school, cut off and awaiting rescue.

For most, rescue never came. Two days later, the school was "cocooned in a spiky, angular mesh of interlocking fragments, large and small" — tree trunks, the joists of houses, boats, beds, bicycles, sheds and refrigerators.

Buildings nearby "had ceased to exist."

"Everything had disappeared," recalled a survivor. "It was as if an atomic bomb had fallen."

At the school, it was a scene of tragedy. The road and the houses were "washed from the earth."

"What stays in my memory," a local resident told Parry, "is pine trees and the legs and arms of children sticking out from under the mud and the rubbish."

Of the elementary school's 108 children, 78 were there at the moment of the

tsunami. Seventy-four of those died; 10 of 11 teachers perished.

"Ghosts of the Tsunami" traces the devastation inflicted by the tsunami — its human toll foremost — the search for survivors and painstaking and thankless task of identifying victims.

"No one was just looking for his own friends or grandchildren," wrote a survivor. "We were pulling everyone out, whoever they were. Every man was weeping as he worked."

Survivors wondered: What had been going on at the school in the period between the earthquake and the wave? Why didn't students and staff run to the hill nearby? Why did they have to die?

Court case

In a country where such lawsuits are uncommon, 19 families brought their case to the Sendai District Court. In an 87-page final judgment, the court surveyed in detail the actions taken by the teachers and found no fault in their behavior immediately after the quake.

But when tsunami warnings blared, "the teachers could have foreseen the coming of a huge tsunami to Okawa Elementary School," the court wrote.

During the subsequent trial, inadequacies in the school's evacuation plan were uncovered.

The place of evacuation chosen was inappropriate and administrators unprepared. Despite the screams of older children who knew the risks of the tsunami, teachers kept children on flat land rather than releasing them to a nearby unobstructed hill. Only those few children who fled to higher ground survived. Those who didn't were slaughtered in the wave.

"Teachers at the school were psychologically unable to accept that they were facing imminent danger," the court found.

It concluded that the deaths arose because the evacuation of the playground was delayed. Children and teachers eventually fled toward the tsunami, not away from it.

The Okawa parents won a \$13.4 million settlement. It was a gratifying moment for the families but a hollow victory.

"All their children were still dead," writes Parry.

Facing disaster

If Japan is "the safest place you could hope to be" after an earthquake, according to Parry, what could happen here?

Fifty-four percent of those who perished as a result of the Japanese tsunami of 2011 were age 65 and older, "and the older you were, the worse your chances," Parry writes.

How can we take safety measures that address the needs of children in classrooms, but the elderly, the physically challenged and the thousands of coastal visitors?

"Ghosts of the Tsunami" is an important read for those of us considering not only the need for tsunami protections, but to meet the human — psychic and spiritual — needs in a disaster's aftermath.

"Over the months, I'd become accustomed to hearing the stories of survivors," relates Taio Kaneta, a Buddhist priest, in the book's concluding pages. "But all of a sudden, I found myself listening to the voices of the dead."

R.J. Marx is *The Daily Astorian's* South County reporter and editor of the *Seaside Signal* and *Cannon Beach Gazette*.



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