

# OPINION

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## WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

# A disaster by which others are measured

## 'A Deadly Wind' looks at Columbus Day storm of 1962

One of many memorable images in "A Deadly Wind: The 1962 Columbus Day Storm" is an eyewitness account of a four-engine plane managing to travel no faster than a car could in noon-hour traffic, slugging its way less than 500 feet above downtown Seattle into the screaming wind.

The pilot of a smaller plane in Hillsboro recalled "flying backwards at full throttle." Going nearly flat-out and running out of fuel, she brought the aircraft in for a landing "straight down, like an elevator."

Hearing horrific tales about the Oct. 12, 1962 storm are part of the initiation for new residents of this coastline. Typhoon Freda formed Oct. 3 and meandered across the Pacific Ocean before whipping itself into a frenzy against the forests and people between Northern California and Vancouver Island. Breathtaking wind speeds were recorded — 179 mph at Coast Guard Station Cape Blanco on the south Oregon coast, 170 mph at Mount Hebo near Tillamook and 160 mph at Radar Ridge near Naselle. Astoria only recorded 96 mph.

What's the fastest you've ever gone, not counting an airplane? For me, it was 120 mph in the passenger's seat of a friend's gleaming white Ford Mustang Mach 1, rocketing through the Utah desert on I-15 bound for Vegas, Disneyland and the Southern California beaches a few weeks after high school graduation. It felt dangerous — and was. Now add 40, 50 or 60 mph on top of that, and we get to the Columbus Day Storm's most reckless velocities.

Younger residents and more recent arrivals will better recall the "Great Coastal Gale of 2007," the leftovers of Typhoons Mitag and Hagibis, which brought a top gust of 147 mph at Radar Ridge. It took one local life when a woman's house burned down on the Long Beach Peninsula. That storm system went on for an entire week-end here on the coast, but wind damage was more localized to the coast and flooding primarily hit the Chehalis River Valley, closing Interstate 5 for several days.

The Columbus Day Storm took many more lives overall — around 46, compared to 18 in December 2007 — and struck not only the coast but all the major inland population centers from the Willamette Valley to Seattle. This urban disaster is the main focus of author John Dodge's "A Deadly Wind," which hardly mentions damage inflicted on Pacific and Clatsop counties in October 1962.

### Each year brings storms

Although today marks the 56th anniversary of the storm and the 50th was the more natural time to mark the occasion, start of any winter storm season is a good time to remember just how violent our weather can be. Especially between now and year's end, our coast is subject to massive storms that can be both entertaining and terrifying, depending on where and how well prepared you are.

One important point made by Dodge

is how unready residents were for the 1962 storm in that time before Doppler radar and near-instant danger notices. Meteorology and hazardous weather notifications have advanced a long way, even just since 2007.

In 1962, ships at sea provided some of the only preliminary warnings of monster winds. A passage from "A Deadly Wind" about a World War II Liberty ship stationed off Northern California:

"I spent three years at seas and that was the worst storm we ever had," said John Hubbard, a retired boilermaker from Midland, Michigan, who was a deckhand on watch that morning on the bridge of the USS *Tracer*.

Hubbard said all on board wondered how much more pounding the flat-bottomed ship could take before it broke apart.

"We'd crest a wave and the ship's screws [propeller] would come out of the water," he said. "I'd never seen swells that big. I was scared s\*\*\*less. I still thank God and the captain of the ship that we made it."

### Cinematic drama

Despite the omission of the mouth of the Columbia and some chafing editing quirks, "A Deadly Wind" is an entertaining look at the storm by which Northwesters judge all others. It places the disaster in its historical context. Among other things, we were in the midst of the Cuban Missile Crisis and culmination of the Seattle World's Fair.

The account of men stuck in a service elevator half way up the Space Needle, playing cards to pass the time as the maelstrom twisted the structure's frame around, would be a heck of a scene to see dramatized in a Hollywood film. For sheer terror, nothing beats the lions that escaped their owners in a Spanaway neighborhood during the confusion, attacking an unsuspecting family. Famous disaster movie director Irwin Allen would have had rich pickings if he had brought the Columbus Day Storm to the silver screen.

In our area, worst conditions arrived about 5 p.m. on that Friday, Oct. 12, with an extremely low pressure of 28.23 inches — compared to about 28.26 this Tuesday in category 3 Hurricane Michael.

There was catastrophic damage to forests, buildings and signs.

Seattle bow hunter Edward Wolfe was warned of the approaching storm, "but expressed confidence and left for Long Island in a 10-foot boat." His body was recovered Nov. 9.

One of several harrowing local episodes was experienced by veterinarian Dr. Allen Goulter and his family:

"They were seated in their living room when all of a sudden a terrific scream was heard and at that same instant the south front wall caved in and crashed to the floor, wall pictures and other articles about the room flying in all directions as the crazy



OSU Press

A new book is a vivid retelling of one of the Pacific Northwest's worst natural disasters.

wind swept through the house. Dr. Goulter ran into the yard, picked up a 6x8 timber which had just previously been torn out of the Goulter veterinary clinic, took it into the living room, and by every member of the household putting his shoulder to the task, raised the wall to its nearly original position and braced it with the timber. Not a one of the plate glass broke."

Salmon cannery roofs were ripped off at the Port of Ilwaco and the port's flagpole was bent into an "L" shape. Oystermen in the south half of Willapa Bay estimated losses at \$300,000 — about \$2.5 million in 2018 dollars — from seed oysters buried by wind-generated waves.

### Tips for now

Nobody — including storm fanatics like myself — wants to see another one like Oct. 12, 1962 or Dec. 7, 2007. Chances are good, though, that we will, like it or not. With this in mind, here's our standing list of storm-preparation tips.

Some cost money most of us don't readily have on hand, but at a minimum I urge residents this time of year to pay close attention to weather warnings. If an intense storm is imminent, fill your vehicle with gasoline and make sure to have a little cash on hand in case power is knocked out to ATMs.

- Make sure you have enough canned and other nonperishable foods to feed your family and your pets for several days.

- The power may go out, so stock up on foods that do not require refrigeration or cooking.

- Be sure you have enough clean drinking water to meet the needs of your family members and pets.

- If you expect to have problems with your water system, fill tubs and sinks

ahead of time, so you will have water for dishes, hygiene, etc.

- Refill prescriptions, stock up on needed medical supplies, and make sure you have a backup plan for any medical equipment that relies on electricity.

- Check to see if you need to stock up on batteries, gas for your generator or propane tanks. Store those items safely.

- Keep essential electronic devices fully charged, so they'll keep working if the power goes out.

- Round up candles, matches, or lanterns and flashlights. Make sure they're in working order.

- Place important documents and contact information in a water-safe container.

- Make plans for keeping your pets dry, safe and warm during the storm. Make a plan for how you will move livestock in the event of severe weather or flooding.

- Be sure that you have essential supplies in all of the places where you might be caught during a bad storm — for example, your workplace, your car.

- Walk around your property, looking for any potential hazards. Take time to secure loose items that could cause damage during a storm.

- Make sure you know where gas and water hookups are located, and how to turn them on and off.

- Check to be sure that you have enough blankets and warm clothing to keep warm if the heat goes out.

- Remember that generators, propane stoves, and charcoal barbecues can all generate carbon monoxide. Never use these items indoors. Use them only outdoors, in well-ventilated areas.

Matt Winters is publisher and editor of the *Chinook Observer* and a member of *The Daily Astorian's* editorial board.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Threaten China with environmental tariff

Regarding the Wall Street Journal article, "Trump Aims to Model New Trade Deals on Revised Nafta" (Oct. 4): Former European Union economic advisor Andre Sapir calls the new U.S., Mexico and Canada agreement, "a power play ... Europe ... would want to have a balanced agreement." Sounds like a back-handed endorsement of President Donald Trump's negotiating prowess.

Since Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) precautions are such a large part of the cost of manufacturing in America, Oregon, Washington and California would greatly benefit from provisions in future agreements demanding identical rules of foreign trading partners.

Threaten an environmental tariff. We are being salted with arsenic, mercury, and sulfur directly traceable to Chinese coal, and we're sick of it.

WAYNE MAYO  
Scappoose

### Buehler a moderate — really?

Knute Buehler, moderate? Really? Let's see.

No comment or stance on Brett Kavanaugh.

Claims to be pro-choice, but thinks abortion is the "wrong option."

Voted against legislation to provide safe abortions.

Has a lifetime rating of "F" from the Oregon League of Conservation.

Voted against the state Clean Fuels program.

Voted against a minimum wage increase before introducing a bill to cut minimum wages.

Wants to cut teachers pay and wages for rural Oregon workers.

Voted against price controls on big pharmaceuticals (he is a doctor, after all).

Voted against Measure 101 and funding for Medicaid.

Opposed a bill to limit prescription copays to \$100 a month

Moderate? No. Just another President Donald Trump lackey ready to follow the rest of the lemmings over the cliff ... and take us all with him.

THOMAS RYAN  
Seaside

### Warrenton city leaders are transparent

There have been some unfortunate and misinformed opinions circulating about Mayor Henry Balensifer, the Warrenton City Commission, and the work they have done.

The accusation that the current city administration and government is simply untrue. Through our attendance we've been able to voice our ideas on improving our city. From our observation, Mayor Balensifer and the commission work well together, and we see no reason to change that.

The mayor's coffee attendance is grow-

ing, town halls have healthy turnouts, the mayor writes in the *Columbia Press* as things come up, and there is a city newsletter you can get upon request. The city fire, police and administration have separate Facebook pages that field many comments and you can get information out about the city. The city website contains the commission packets, unless it's a legal document, where the public can view all the information the commissioners have before a meeting.

Leadership requires consideration — consideration of the many volunteers who make up the city's boards. Why is it necessary for the opposing candidate to mention the mayor's wife, who was appointed under the mayor's wife, and elected to chair the library board by her fellow advisory board members on her own merit? Trying to insinuate the mayor's wife is part of some kind of conspiracy doesn't seem fair or right.

BRENDA HOXSEY  
Warrenton