

OPINION

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Flavel demise was long, often painful



Clatsop County Historical Society photos
ABOVE: Mary Louise Flavel, right, next to Metropolitan Opera bass Jerome Hines and his wife in 1959. BELOW: Undated photo of Flavel. RIGHT: Flavel's school photo from 1943.



If you are new to Astoria, visiting Ocean View Cemetery is a useful excursion. Like the many other cemeteries of Clatsop County, it is a place brimming with history. No gravesite at Ocean View is more laden with information and misinformation than the Flavel plot. It was cathartic to see the photo of Mary Louise Flavel's fresh grave in the Nov. 12 edition of this newspaper.

The Flavel gravesites are dominated by an obelisk marking the grave of the clan's



STEVE FORRESTER

founder, Capt. George Flavel. This marker is an echo of Henry W. Corbett's obelisk in Riverview Cemetery — the resting place of Portland's financial and social register overlooking the Willamette River. If the Corbetts were Portland's premier pioneer family, the Flavels once were

Astoria's social and financial centerpiece.

Mary Louise Flavel's passing marks the end of the saga. But in literary parlance, the climax of that multi-generational novel occurred decades ago. We've been watching the long and often painful denouement. The long-decrepit house at 15th and Franklin was the symbol of the family's decline. So were the shabby Flavel properties that flanked the 900 block of Commercial Street.

Even before moving here to become the Astorian's editor, I heard about the Flavel soap opera — but from a surprising source. Oregon Sen. Mark Hatfield told me of how the Flavels would approach him at unlikely moments in their endeavor to get Harry Flavel off from his assault conviction.

Thirteen years into my life as this paper's editor, I received a call from the New York writer Calvin Trillin. I stifled the urge to tell one of my prankster friends to knock it off. Then I realized it really was Trillin. He had been reading clippings about the criminal case of Harry Flavel.

"Is this still going on?" Trillin asked.

"It will always go on," I replied.

Trillin said he wanted to come here to gather material for an article about the Flavels for *The New Yorker* magazine. I offered him a desk in our newsroom.

By that time, I suppose I had heard all of the Flavel stories — real or imagined. Because my wife and I are opera enthusiasts, I was especially fascinated with Mary Louise's professional relationship with the Metropolitan Opera

bass Jerome Hines. In 1980, we had seen Hines as the Grand Inquisitor in a Met production of Verdi's opera *Don Carlo*.

When we moved to Astoria, we met some of the older Astorians who had known Harry and Mary Louise as contemporaries. One of the stories they told involved Hines' concert appearance in Astoria. The story I was told more than once is that the Flavels failed to pay Hines' performance fee, sticking other Astorians with the tab. I was all the more startled to see a photo of Hines and Mary Louise in the October 1959 issue of *Opera News* magazine. Hines is in costume as Hercules, flanked by his wife and Flavel.

Trillin's article, "First Family of Astoria," is essential to grasping the tragicomedy of the Flavel story. It is published in *Astorians: Eccentric and Extraordinary*, a book available at this newspaper or the gift shop of the Capt. George Flavel House. Trillin's interview with Mary Louise contains a touching moment when he notices that the edges of her coat are frayed — a metaphor for the fate of the once-grand family.

After 14 years in Astoria, I had become impressed with Astorians' penchant for handing around misinformation. One of the best examples of this pathology was a lawyer who told me that her husband had come home one evening and said: "I hear we're getting a divorce." In a column, I developed the concept that if Portland is the City of Roses, Astoria must be the City of Rumors. The Flavels were Topic A of that game.

There is more than one way of describing Mary Louise Flavel. Trillin's interview confirms that she maintained a big grudge against Astoria. Perhaps in retaliation, she clung to ownership of her residential and commercial properties for no rational financial reason. At the same time it was impressive that following Harry's death she seemed to take charge of her personal

life. Our dogged reporter Chelsea Gorrow found Mary Louise in a new Portland domicile and gave our readers a splendid interview. It is worth reading today.

The next draft of the Flavel history will come from the Astoria historian John Goodenberger. That should be a good read. As reporters Erick Bengel and Katie Frankowicz wrote, "Her death closes a chapter in a long, complex history where fact and fiction often tangle in messy, difficult knots."

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of *The Daily Astorian*, is the president and CEO of *EO Media Group*.

'Her death closes a chapter in a long, complex history where fact and fiction often tangle in messy, difficult knots.'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Same book predicts Israel, Christ's second coming

We would all like to think that we are intelligent people, and not prone to fall for any absurdity, such as believing in a flat earth. Our pride tells us that we do not fall for myths or fairy tales, and we are beyond accepting these things that children readily adhere to.

But, if you are unwilling to follow the evidence to where it leads, or examine truths that run contrary to your own preconceived ideas, you might just be putting yourself in a position to be royally duped.

Stop and consider these facts for a moment. There is a nation whose people were removed from their homeland by invading armies, not once, but twice. The first time this occurred was about 500 B.C. by the Babylonians, and the second was around 135 A.D. by the Romans, after the Bar Kokhba revolt.

The writings of the Jews describe a time when this same people would return to this same piece of land, and would prosper. It is amazing that even their original language is now the official language of the nation of Israel. These are not myths, but historical facts that no one in their right mind would consider refuting.

This same book which predicted the return of the nation of Israel almost 2,000 years before, is the same book that describes the First and Second Advent (Christmas and Christ's second coming).

CARL YATES
Seaside

Customer service will never go out of style

One of the many things I love about Astoria is our customer-focused, locally owned businesses. It's such a pleasure to go

into a business where you know the owner, he or she knows you, and you have confidence that they have your best interests at heart.

For example, call in to Paramount Drugs downtown with your prescription refill, let them know when you need it, and it's all ready when you arrive. There are no long waits, everything is human scale, and it feels more like visiting friends.

Astoria is rich with local businesses like this and they add greatly to our quality of life. Chain and big box stores certainly have their place. But whenever possible, I like to get the things I need from friends and neighbors, the local businesses that supply and support our community. Old-fashioned, gracious customer service will never go out of style.

ROGER ROCKA
Astoria

Meetings will steer Astoria's future direction

Two important meetings about the future direction of Astoria.

Tonight at 6:30 p.m., Astoria's Planning Commission will hold an Urban Core planning workshop to gain information about what should be built on either side of the trolley tracks between Second and 16th streets.

Many Sept. 13 meeting attendees spoke and wrote comments such as maintain existing views of the river, don't want to leave the Riverwalk to view the river, no new buildings over the water, no 29 to 45-foot buildings on both sides of the Riverwalk, no balconies facing the Riverwalk, and determine enough parking locations before approving zoning for multi-story buildings.

On Dec. 12 at 6:30 p.m., the Astoria City Council will hold a public hearing on the developer's appeal of his 47-foot-tall massive Fairfield Hotel, at Second Street. If the council approves his appeal of the Design Review

Committee's vote, there will be no more public hearings.

Many concerns with the proposed Urban Core plan are evident in this project, which could set a precedent for development between Second and 16th streets, such as balconies facing the Riverwalk and limited parking — which makes it impossible to repurpose Stephanie's Cabin — and provides none for their 25-35 employees.

GEORGE "MICK" HAGUE
Astoria

Homestays part of what makes Astoria great

After reading the homestay lodging story, about how code changes will address the illegal short-term rentals, I would now like to address "legal" homestay lodging ("Astoria moves forward on homestay lodging license," *The Daily Astorian*, Nov. 20).

By the story's definition, legal is an owner hosting a guest in their home where they live. Why do you think someone would invite a guest to stay in an extra bedroom, in their home, and not have it safe? Codes that require an expensive inspection for so-called safety concerns seem to ignore this fact: It is the homeowner who would be sued if some accident occurred, not the city.

These codes hurt the very people who pay property taxes, funding the city, the schools, the port, the library, the new jail, etc. Homeowners are not the problem. You should embrace homestays and view them as part of what makes this town great. If they want, any homeowner should do a little hosting if they have the extra room.

It can be a positive experience. The city gets more lodging tax. The homeowner/property taxpayer gets help paying for that new jail. You can fill it up with all those illegal operators you speak of. How?

Make hosting in Astoria free. Yes, free.

With all the possible legal homestay locations signed up, the city could have a much easier time finding those illegal operators.

What they will not find is some lost supply of affordable housing stock. It is not hiding somewhere in our neighborhoods. Affordable housing needs to be built new.

JOHN GINDER
Astoria

Social costs mount in tourist economy

A simple solution to the "struggle to address illegal short-term rentals" would be to declare them all illegal ("Astoria moves forward on homestay lodging license," *The Daily Astorian*, Nov. 20).

When a city decides it must license and otherwise regulate commercial homestays and collect lodging taxes, to me it appears to be complicit in local housing shortages and rising housing costs.

I have never understood why traditional "brick and mortar" resort hotels and others in the hospitality sector have never taken a position on short-term home rentals.

Is the proliferation of vacation home rentals really a sacred "property rights" issue, or have the hotel people been quietly enjoying a marked increase in their share of lodging tax money generated by homestays? A win-win, i.e. money for nothing to add to their government subsidy to spend on promotional advertising?

And finally, will the city put its share of fees and lodging tax revenues into a dedicated fund to maintain parks or other public amenities, or will these monies disappear into the general operating fund?

As the social costs of living in a tourist economy continue to mount, like it or not, we all are paying a price.

GARY DURHEIM
Seaside