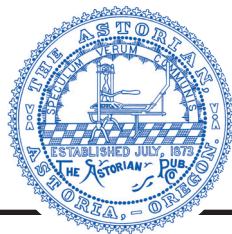


OPINION



the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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GUEST COLUMN

Positive examples of our America

Seeking some positives, I found them on Washington's Long Beach Peninsula, where I have lived 21 years.

To start the day, I met the folks from Peace of Mind of Pacific County hosting a healthy beach-trail walk. America has a mental health problem. Our go-go-go, win-win-win, must-be-svelte-or-we'll-shame-you society has a lot to answer for. An enlightened nation would focus resources on mental health issues, which should have the same priority as treating physical ailments with no stigma.



PATRICK WEBB

America is a noble experiment, but it sure has some flaws. This country put a man on the moon, for goodness sake, and has the most scientific Nobel Prize winners. Yet health care is not a human right here. It is something you pay for, if you can afford it. Some of my closest friends defend this.

Rock stars

Next I joined the Friends of the Ilwaco and Ocean Park Libraries at their annual meeting. They had booked the Hilltop School auditorium in Ilwaco. It seats a couple of hundred; 16 were present.

A guest speaker offered reassurances that branch closures in the multiple-library network are not planned, as had been feared, but opening hours may be curtailed for budget reasons.

The Friends group raises money, mainly through sales of donated books, to pay for equipment and supplies that the network fails to provide. It is an organization that should not have to exist; I am glad it does.

Not supporting libraries is such a foolish step. Librarians rock — and their campaigns for widespread free access to information should be vigorously supported. I enjoy Ilwaco's fall promotion of Banned Books Week, although I would make that a year-round commemoration.

From my property taxes last year, \$112.31 went to the library. I got that back in the value of loaned books in less than two months. One year, when I was conducting research, the value of library materials I borrowed equalled my entire annual property tax bill.

Libraries are all about lifelong learning, and cement formal education.

Two friends recently posted online comments denigrating the value of attending college. Both suggested university folks are some sort of weakling snowflakes, as if history and philosophy are a waste of time.

I am inclined to think the failure to study history — and learn from it — contributes greatly to today's malaise. Colleges, like all schools, should teach critical thinking to broaden viewpoints. I earned credits for my two degrees in journalism, business, statistics, Shakespeare, religion and even counseling. It does not make me an expert in any topic, but studying stretched me. The subject matter is only a part of the experience. And, like many college-educated folks, I concede that "real life" has taught me important lessons, too.

But children should be brought up to question everything, especially the status quo. It is the best lesson a teacher can give them, hands down, or in this case, hands up.

A popular effort promotes young people training to be plumbers and electricians after high school rather than college. I totally buy that; but it must be an alternative rather than a replacement. One terrific Long Beach company, Oman's, helped this recently with a remarkably generous donation of tools to the shop class at Ilwaco High School.



Patrick Webb

Pacific County Peace of Mind leaders joined forces with supporters of two other community help groups for the 10th annual Mental Wellness Walk in Long Beach in May. Left to right: Elly Rosaire, Nikki Fortuna and Nolan Carlson.



Patrick Webb

The Hilltop Auditorium in Ilwaco seats a couple of hundred, but there were only 16 present for the recent annual meeting of the Friends of Ilwaco and Ocean Park Libraries.



Patrick Webb

Tristan Trudell plays the saxophone during a concert and dessert social staged by director Rachel Lake and the Ilwaco High School jazz band.

Other nations put teachers on pedestals, reward them financially, and value their contribution to society. It is a puzzle we don't do that in the United

States. Instead, we allow unqualified lay people to interfere, limiting the curriculum with their narrow views. Sad, and wrong.

All that jazz

Next I drove to the Chinook School to hear the splendid sounds of the Ilwaco High School jazz band. The school is blessed with the skill of dedicated teacher Rachel Lake, who leads the music program and finds time to direct and appear in theatrical shows; she is a true dynamo.

It was a treat to watch parents like Jennifer Carper and Jeff Chabot positively glow as they watched their talented children, Alexandra and Brendan, play solos in the saxophone section. The musician seated with them, Tristan Trudell, is likewise a bright, polite, talented youngster. This spring, the trio went to Germany with the Astoria Sister City students to broaden their education; I applaud them.

In May, Trudell was the alternate on the relay team that earned a medal at the state track championships. Can you imagine that? Keeping yourself fit, ready to step up if one of the other boys was hurt, knowing that moment of triumph was unlikely. As Milton wrote, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

Patrick Webb is the retired managing editor of *The Astorian*.

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