

OPINION



the Astorian

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Season of ripe apples, rich memories

Every few years, sugar just might coalesce out of the kiln-baked soil in my grandparents' plum thicket at their little retirement ranch in western Wyoming.

The plums were the size of cheap green olives, hard enough to use for sling-shot ammo until September, when the first daredevil winds tobogganed down the mountains and playfully knocked them down. A presidential administration might come and go before any survived until they were edible. But when the marauding frosts lurked above 6,000 feet for a precious extra couple of weeks, earth's delicious alchemy of slanting sun and towering August thunderstorms infused them with sweetness.

In those exceptional years, a slippery fermenting mass of ripe purple bonbons enticed mule deer down from the hills to get plum drunk, silly as kindergartners at an all-you-can-eat cotton-candy buffet.

Grandma Bell kept canned foods in the dark recesses lining her dirt-floored cellar, where a pump always in need of Grandpa's tinkering stayed half a step ahead of the ditchwater that seeped through the walls. Although grandma had a Tibetan monk's sense of frugality, I don't remember that she ever made preserves from her plums — they may have been just too fickle.



MATT WINTERS



Winters family
Farm kids, including a couple of Matt Winters granduncles, relished homegrown apples and made temporary pets of chickens and pigs in the mountains of western Wyoming.



Reveille Ciderworks
Availability of regionally made craft ciders has greatly expanded in the past decade and now includes Reveille Ciderworks in Astoria.

around the Columbia River estuary. They also may date from pioneer times and could even represent rare "lost apples" — cultivars that slipped beyond memory as varieties like Red Delicious took over grocery-store produce aisles. My grandpa's apple orchard may well have been planted in the 1880s by some veteran of Antietam, thirsty for the magical elixir that a perfect hard cider can be. Apples were planted here along the Lower Columbia starting back in the early 19th century when the Hudson's Bay Company was, in effect, the government. Saving these archaic apples from oblivion has become something of a pet cause in the Pacific Northwest.

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Liquid apples

Johnny Appleseed was a real man, John Chapman, who traveled the young nation from the 1790s creating fenced apple nurseries. These were in effect operated as some of America's first agricultural cooperatives, selling trees to neighbors on shares. In an era when contaminated water was a relentless killer, hard cider was a pure, mildly inebriating beverage that also provided a way to package and preserve many of the nutritional benefits of apples. Cider mills were scattered across the country, and provided Chapman with free seeds to encourage the planting of orchards. Increasing immigration from Germany, with its adoration of beer, combined with the disruption of Prohibition to blight the cider business. Today, most people think of cider as a less-refined form of apple juice, an autumn novelty of no consequence.

There is a sensation like biting into a crisp, tart apple when you sip a great hard cider, a rapturous transportation into an idyllic fall morning — perhaps like my grandparents' old orchard where I can still imagine the frost evaporating off into white vapor, a bright crescent moon looking close enough to touch still floating

high above the sage- and pine-clad mountains. Like a good wine, a well-made cider encapsulates the best of its birthplace — I think I first could imagine England after my first taste of Woodpecker, a medium-sweet cider available from importers.

Most mass-market ciders available in grocery stores have far more in common with wine coolers than legitimate cider, being a carbonated concoction of apple juice and other ingredients. Thank heavens, we're lucky here in the Pacific Northwest to be near the world's most celebrated apple-growing region and many new artisan cider makers. Last week I tried two offerings from Astoria's Reveille Ciderworks — a general-purpose cider and another infused with marionberries — and endorse them both.

Mom made applesauce most autumns in her 85 years, another way to preserve and enjoy the essential goodness of fall. Months later, as the rain pounded down, we'd open a jar and relive autumn's perfect weeks of starry nights, dewy dawns and shirtsleeve afternoons. I know my daughter, after once spending an afternoon learning at her grandma's side, will always keep a perfect apple in her heart.

Chinook Observer editor Matt Winters lives in Ilwaco.

OTHER VIEWS

Selected editorials from Oregon newspapers

The Oregonian, on Malheur County calling for investigation into reporters' actions

Usually, when public officials don't want to answer a reporter's questions, they respond with "no comment."

In Malheur County, however, they're trying something a little more hardcore.

The Malheur County counsel asked Sheriff Brian Wolfe to open a criminal investigation into the actions of Malheur Enterprise reporters. Their alleged crime? Sending emails to the personal accounts of county economic development employees outside of office hours which Greg Smith, director of the Malheur County Economic Development Department, has deemed "not appropriate."

Let's be clear. That isn't a crime. That's called reporting. Journalists frequently try to contact government officials and others through official and non-official channels as they pursue leads, develop sources, gather documents and build a story. They also try to make every attempt to reach them if they are writing a story relating to the officials or their work, so that the officials have the opportunity to refute conclusions, correct information or explain their side of a story. There's nothing inappropriate and certainly nothing illegal about it.

In a call with The Oregonian's editorial board, Smith acknowledged that going to the sheriff's office might not have been the right avenue. He added that journalists have every right to contact him and that he has tried to be open and responsive to public records requests and journalists' inquiries. But he

said his employees have felt intimidated by the frequency of emails from the Enterprise, the exhaustiveness of their information requests and the window of time given to them before publication. He added that they believe Enterprise journalists are not disclosing personal conflicts and biases and are using their position to settle scores.

The Enterprise, meantime, has said it has used "standard and professional methods." To drive that point home, the newspaper published a column Sunday describing how the story was reported and sharing the full text of emails sent to Smith seeking responses or rebuttals.

If Smith had concerns, there are other avenues to resolve them, from writing op-eds to even filing civil lawsuits if the situation merits it. Seeking a criminal investigation is an inappropriate use of government resources and appears more of an attempt to dissuade or intimidate reporters. Especially considering that Smith, who is also the Republican representative for Heppner in the Oregon House, has been the subject of recent Malheur Enterprise stories raising questions about the work he has done in his position as the county's economic development director.

As a legislator, Smith knows that media scrutiny is a critical component of keeping government accountable. He shouldn't look to government to suppress that scrutiny.

Albany Democrat-Herald, on death penalty legislation

Nearly two months have passed since the 2019 Legislature wrapped up its work, but there's still plenty of confusion surrounding one of the session's most significant bills, the measure that limits how the death penalty can be applied in Oregon.

The key question is this: Is the bill retroactive — that is, does it apply to the 31 inmates who are on death row in Oregon?

One of the bill's key backers, state Sen. Floyd Prozanski, a Eugene Democrat, has said a special legislative session is required to make it clear the law doesn't apply to death penalty cases sent back for new sentencing hearings as well as new trials. But another backer, former House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, D-Portland, has said no additional work is needed on the bill and that it always was intended to cover situations such as new sentencing hearings in old cases and new trials.

A recent opinion by the state Department of Justice sided with Williamson's interpretation, noting that the new law applies to death penalty convictions and sentences that have been overturned, in addition to pending cases.

The measure in question, Senate Bill 1013, narrows the definition of "aggravated murder," the only crime in Oregon that can be punished by death. The death penalty in Oregon now can only be applied in four types of crimes: killings motivated by terrorism, murders of children 14 years or younger, killings by an incarcerated person who's serving a previous aggravated murder sentence and premeditated killings of police or corrections officers.

Other crimes that used to be considered aggravated murder, such as slayings committed during a rape or robbery, no longer can be punished with the death penalty.

The bill was carefully constructed (perhaps too carefully) to ensure that it didn't require a vote of the people; such a vote would be required of a measure that called for completely doing away with the death penalty in Oregon.

It's probably fair to say that many, if not most, legislators believed that the bill was not meant to apply retroactively. In that light, the

measure didn't seem likely to make much difference for death-row inmates: It's been more than two decades since Oregon executed a prisoner and Gov. Kate Brown is continuing a moratorium on the death penalty that was instituted by her predecessor, John Kitzhaber.

But the idea that the bill could be applied retroactively to some cases changes that calculation to some extent: As The Oregonian's Noelle Crombie reported, it's not at all unusual for aggravated-murder convictions or death penalty sentences to be overturned or remanded to a lower court. In fact, Crombie noted, seven cases have been reversed in the last two-and-a-half years, and not one of Oregon's death row inmates has exhausted their legal challenges. It would be interesting to see if legislators approach the bill differently should it come up again in a special session or next year's short session.

Regardless of what happens to Senate Bill 1013, legislators should stop sneaking around the issue of the death penalty and fully confront it by referring to voters a measure to abolish capital punishment in Oregon.

Oregonians have a long and tangled history with the death penalty. Capital punishment was outlawed by Oregon voters in 1914 and then reenacted in 1978. Three years later, the state Supreme Court ruled that the death penalty was unconstitutional, a ruling that paved the way for a 1984 initiative in which voters reaffirmed capital punishment.

Since then, the topic rarely has been revisited in Oregon, and the gubernatorial moratoriums have had the effect of sweeping the debate about capital punishment under the rug. Meanwhile, the national conversation about the death penalty has taken fascinating turns.

It's been almost four decades since state voters affirmed the death penalty. It's long past time to bring this conversation to all of Oregon.