

GUEST COLUMN

A look back on a lifetime of change

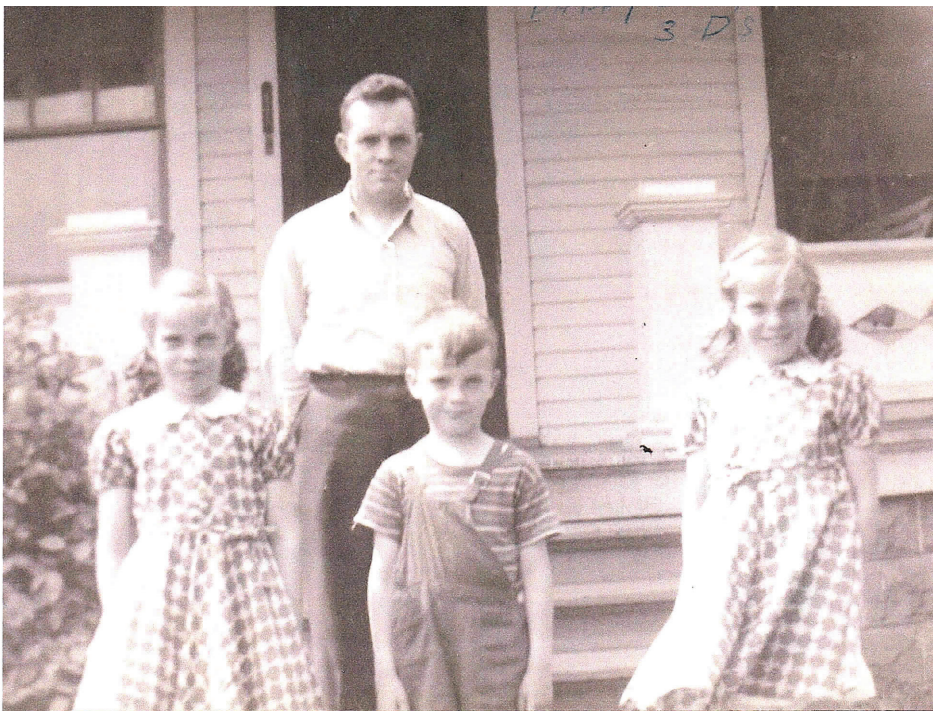
Being isolated from the coronavirus pandemic gave lots of time to reminisce about remarkable changes that have transformed the world and reshaped our lives since the 1930s. They’re changes most of us old-timers are thankful for.

Take aircraft, for example. Before World War II, jets and helicopters were never seen. Even propeller-driven airplanes weren’t seen very often. As a little kid in the 1930s, whenever I heard a plane, nobody thought it odd to run out of the house to look as it slowly flew overhead.

Today, hardly anybody notices U.S. Coast Guard helicopters, or notice that supersonic military jets fly faster than bullets fired from guns.



DON HASKELL



Don Haskell with his father and twin sisters.

dad brought home an electric washing machine with wringers operated by a foot switch. Before that she washed clothes every Monday in a big metal tub with a washboard and wringers operated with a hand crank.

Automatic electric washers and dryers didn’t come into vogue until after World War II. Before that, clothes were fastened with wood clothespins to dry on a backyard line. And everybody pitched in to quickly take the clothes off the line whenever it looked like rain.

My first allowance was a dime a week. Four cents went for a movie on Saturday afternoon. And a penny for candy. The rest went into a milk bottle I used for a bank. By the time my allowance got to a quarter, movies cost a dime.

And after the attack at Pearl Harbor in 1941, my parents insisted my sisters and I listen to President Franklin Roosevelt whenever he spoke on the radio. But it seemed to me he always gave a speech whenever my favorite radio program was on.

To save gas for the war effort, the speed limit all over America during World War II was 35 mph. If you drove faster than that, you were unpatriotic and yelled at. While America today is energy independent, Clatsop County is still dealing with pollution caused by World War II shipbuilding. And America 80

years later is still cleaning up wartime’s nuclear Hanford site just 280 miles east of Astoria.

Toward the end of World War II, television sets began to appear in furniture stores. The sets had tiny 2-inch black and white screens in the middle of gigantic wooden boxes taller than I was. And they cost a small fortune. Today, color television sets are an inch thick and 6 feet wide. They’re so affordable almost everybody in the country owns at least one.

My first car at 16 was a well-used 1935 Hudson Terraplane 8-cylinder powerhouse. It cost \$75. All high school parking lots today show teenagers’ lust for cars is one thing that hasn’t changed at all over the years.

When I got out of law school in the 1950s, I remember wondering how I would ever make a living with 150,000 other lawyers in America. Yet by 2020, America’s lawyer population grew to 1.35 million. And with about 4% of the world’s population, today’s America has 70% of the world’s lawyers.

In the late 1970s my Chicago law firm installed an up-to-date, high-tech computer. It had its own air-conditioned room, was much bigger than today’s biggest refrigerator and ran reels of tape. And the damn thing, which cost a mind-boggling \$100,000, kept breaking

down every couple of days.

Today, cellphones are tiny computers that have unbelievably more power than that huge office computer of 40 years ago.

Around the late 1970s, a friend suggested I buy stock in the company he worked for. The company had the odd name of Microsoft. Alas, I thought computers were nothing but expensive headaches and didn’t take my friend’s advice.

For many years, calling overseas or sending messages with a telex machine cost a lot of money. Nowadays with WhatsApp and Wi-Fi you can text for free anywhere in the world. Coin-operated telephone booths on street corners and in businesses have all but disappeared. Technology replaced switchboards and switchboard operators. Just like copiers and printers replaced carbon paper, stencils and mimeograph machines. And like computers replaced typewriters and word-processing machines.

In the 1980s, French clients insisted I fly the supersonic Concorde for meetings in Paris. The plane flew so high the daytime sky was black and the earth’s curvature looked awesome. Oddly enough, it took less time to fly non-stop from Chicago to Paris on a Boeing 747. That’s because I had to fly to New York or Washington, D.C., to get on the Concorde.

In those days, sonic booms prohibited the Concorde from flying over populated areas. Newly designed supersonic airplanes now in the works, however, will eliminate sonic booms, soon fly anywhere in the world, and cause another life-altering change in the way we travel.

It took me years to fully appreciate the greatest life-altering change of my lifetime — the development of computers and the dramatic way they’ve changed the world and the way we live. Today my great-grandchildren have a lot of fun playing mesmerizing games on tiny computers. Even the 2-year-old presses the right buttons on his mother’s cellphone.

And when I tell my great-grandchildren I spent almost my entire life without a cellphone, they look at me wide-eyed as if I couldn’t possibly be that old. Makes me wonder what life-altering changes Methuselah felt thankful for.

Don Haskell is a retired attorney and former Clatsop County commissioner who lives in Astoria.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Out of proportion

Regarding the article “County calls for testing, inspections at seafood processors after virus outbreaks” (The Astorian, June 4): I was alarmed to read in the paper that 84% of seafood processing workers who tested positive for COVID-19 in Clatsop County are Latinx.

Given that 38 of the 48 people who have tested positive for the disease in the county are “directly linked to outbreaks at Bornstein Seafoods in Astoria and Pacific Seafood in Warrenton,” that means that roughly 70% of the positive cases are Latinx. This number is hugely out of proportion when compared to the county’s Latinx population, which is 8.7%, according to U.S. census data.

This shows that the disproportionate impact of coronavirus on people of color is not just an urban problem. It is a problem right here in our county, and I think this news is worthy of a headline, rather than the one chosen for this article.

I applaud county public health director Michael McNickle for bringing attention to this issue and requesting state resources to address it. I wholeheartedly agree with his statement, “It is counter to public health best practices and common decency to allow a vulnerable minority population to work in an environment that increases the chances of acquiring a potentially lethal disease.”

MARGARET MINNICK
Astoria

Disheartened

I was disheartened to see about 50% of the shoppers at Fred Meyer not wearing masks. Apparently these anti-masks feel it is just too inconvenient for them to wear a mask for 30 minutes to protect everyone from an invisible and deadly contagion that they could be unaware they are spreading.

But I am both disgusted and disheartened to learn that there were counterprotesters to the recent local Black Lives Matter protest. I suppose I knew the contagion of racism exists everywhere, but it is still sad to see it here.

I know there are many fine police officers who serve and protect, but unless they are willing to police themselves, those pernicious bad apples will spoil the bunch.

Peer pressure can work both ways; they should step up and point out when any fellow officer uses excessive force. It’s a badge, not a license to kill.

SHERRIE HAMMOND
Hammond

Summer months

I wanted to write something cheery with the summer months ahead. However, it’s difficult for me this year with COVID-19 and its noncompliers, plus now the ugliness of racism and, more important, subtle racism.

Both the noncompliance and racism are rooted in illogic. Anyway, hopefully within the near months, we will have a vaccine. The other has been with us for centuries.

Back to something just cheery, the rhododendrons came out beautifully again this year. Astoria was a flower garden despite the empty stores. The beauty of flowers and other vegetation is uplifting to the human spirit. To walk or just sit and look at the spring wonder while breathing the fresh air is, to me, just great.

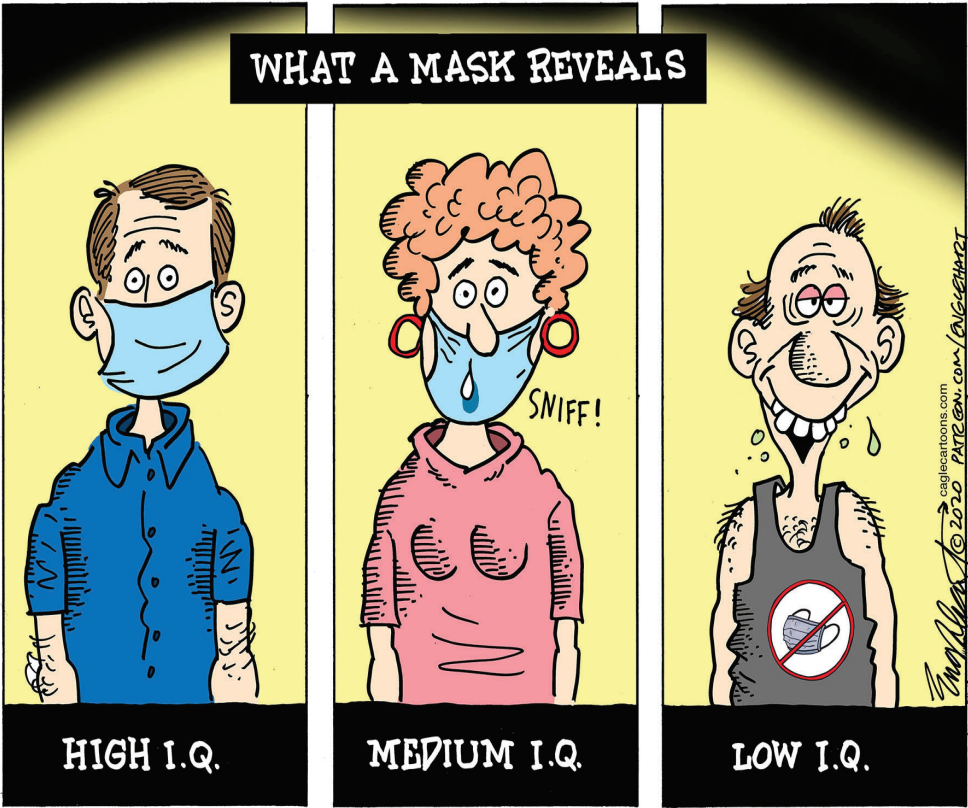
In Astoria, the days can change from cool to warm depending on the part of town you are in. Here we are warm at 70 degrees, and have a heat wave at 85 degrees. I remember the South being 90 degrees and sweaty in April.

The big rains have ceased, and now we wish we had more to keep things from drying up — but it is hard to beat summers here.

In the past, I remember trying to schedule time off for at least a few days from the heat. My wife and I thought about Colorado and California but said, “Hey, we have never been to the Oregon Coast.” That was years ago, and the beginning of our love affair with Astoria.

Be safe for you and others.

NORM HOOGE
Astoria



Overturn

I would hope we can overturn the January 2020 environmental regulation rollback of the Clean Water Rule signed by the Trump administration.

We need to restore President Lyndon Johnson’s 1966 Clean Waters Restoration Act.

This January rule makes it legal to dump pesticides, etc., into marshlands, streams and groundwater. Our fish and wildlife already have a tough time without adding to their hardships.

MARIE WESTLIND
Clatskanie

Puzzling

When President Barack Obama ran for reelection, a letter to the editor warned if Obama was reelected, he would order guns in the U.S. to be confiscated.

No matter the right to bear arms is a constitutional right, and has been upheld by the Supreme Court; the author assured readers they would be confiscated. Of course, it never hap-

pened. Obama was reelected, and there were no attempts to confiscate guns.

Fast forward and there is a different president. A person who shows little regard for the Constitution or the laws of the land. He is a draft dodger, and he is a coward — when peaceful protesters became too numerous, he was rushed to the White House bunker, claiming it was for an inspection.

To demonstrate courage, he decided to stroll to a nearby church for a photo op, but first had law enforcement clear a path, using horses and tear gas among protesters exercising their First Amendment rights.

I wonder if the author who wrote about Obama is staying quiet about the erosion of the First Amendment? Is it only the Second Amendment he worries about? It seems we always see and hear the National Rifle Association defend the Second Amendment.

Could it be the NRA has no interest in preserving the First Amendment? Yet they use the First Amendment to speak loudly about the need to preserve the Second Amendment. Puzzling.

ERIK JENSEN
Warrenton