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GUEST COLUMN

Peace comes from within the heart

Dec. 7, 1941 is a date seared into the memory of Americans. On this day, a surprise attack on American battleships in Hawaii sparked a conflict between America and Japan that brought millions of families into a brutal war. Another historic date is Sept. 2, 1945, when military representatives signed the surrender documents that brought World War II to an official end.

Unfortunately, wars do not end with a signature. The hatred and distrust that brings two nations to war continues to simmer and is often compounded by new suffering and loss created by the fighting. A familiar example is America’s Civil War, which ended 155 years ago but still burns like a red hot ember, ready to burst into flames.

Americans and Japanese were fierce enemies. Even 50 years after the signing of the treaty, it was common to hear disparaging insults about the Japanese. Many people refused to purchase anything made in Japan, while others declared that America should have dropped more atomic bombs on more cities.

But a transformation is taking place between the Japanese and their former enemies, which has reached a level never seen before between former warring nations. There is a widespread desire by Americans, British, Australians and others, to reach out to their former enemies and provide comfort to the Japanese families who lost someone during the war.

Every day, somewhere in the world, someone is packaging up a hard-won “battlefield souvenir” with the intention of having it returned to the bereaved family in Japan. The reason, we are told, is to provide that family with closure and to reconcile their lingering grief.

Peace is not accomplished with a signature on a piece of paper. Peace comes from within the heart and nowhere in the world can a better example of reconciliation be found than this unique outreach between WWII allies and the families in Japan.

Obon Society is proud to play an essential role in making it possible for these families to find each other.

Rex Ziak is the co-founder and president of the Obon Society, a nonprofit humanitarian organization headquartered in Astoria.

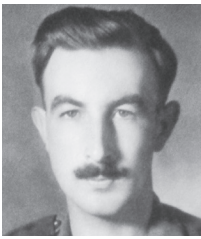
PEACE IS NOT ACCOMPLISHED WITH A SIGNATURE ON A PIECE OF PAPER. PEACE COMES FROM WITHIN THE HEART AND NOWHERE IN THE WORLD CAN A BETTER EXAMPLE OF RECONCILIATION BE FOUND THAN THIS UNIQUE OUTREACH BETWEEN WWII ALLIES AND THE FAMILIES IN JAPAN.



A flag carried by Haruo Saito, a Japanese soldier, during World War II.



The Saito family with Haruo Saito’s remains at a cemetery to show ancestors he had finally returned home.



Charles Gower Neville, a British soldier, served in World War II.



Haruo Saito was a Japanese soldier killed in World War II.

LETTERS

*Letters from a British soldier in World War II and the family of a Japanese soldier who died in the war were exchanged through the Obon Society.

Dear Rex and Keiko,

This is in response to our discussions and my wish to send a message to any relatives and friends of Haruo Sato who died at Meiktila, Burma on 22 July 1944.

I am Charles Neville, born in England in 1920, joined the British Army in 1941, was trained as an engineer officer, sent to India and attached to the Indian Engineers. I joined a Field Company of Engineers and we were sent to Assam to help maintain a road from Assam into Burma, especially through the monsoon.

This involved improving existing roads and tracks, building new roads and bridges for the Army.

In 1944 the Japanese Army started withdrawing but put up much resistance at Meiktila. We reached Meiktila several days after the battle and much had been cleared up. As I walked a little way into the area I noticed two flags on the ground. I was aware that it was customary for Japanese soldiers to carry their national flag. When I saw a lot of writing on one I realized I had come across something special that should be treated with great care and respect.

Months later I returned to England. For years I had no idea what I should do with them but my son Leslie contacted the Japanese Embassy in Toronto and so we learned about the OBON Society and the good work they are doing. A long time later I heard that a family member had been traced. This made me very very pleased and thankful that I had kept the flags safe for seventy five years and that they will be returned to the Sato family and friends.

I would like to say a few words to Harou’s nephew and friends.

I lost an uncle in the 1914 to 1918 World War. His name was Gower, which is my middle name in memory of him. I can appreciate some of the feelings you may have.

It has been a great honour to have become so involved.

Most sincerely,

Charles Gower Neville

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Dear Charles Gower Neville,

Thank you very much for returning the flag of my uncle, Haruo Saito. I believe that my late uncle must be so glad to come home finally. I really appreciate Mr. Charles Gower Neville have looked after the flag over 70 years until today.

All the brothers met together and we visited our family grave with the flag. I am grateful that you, Mr. Neville, gave us this kind of precious opportunity.

I hope for your good health. And we will treasure the flag forever. Please excuse my poor writing.

Thank you very much,
2019, Hiroshi Saito

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Working families

When Debbie Boothe-Schmidt states that she will “fight for working families,” just exactly whom will she be fighting for?

For struggling business owners who create jobs and tax revenue? And their employees, who depend on their paychecks? Who may or may not still have a business or a job? And may have never received a single Oregon unemployment check to date?

Or, will she fight for public sector Service Employees International Union and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, who consume revenue?

These families have gone unscathed during this time, with fully-funded paychecks, benefits and retirement not missing a beat, all paid for courtesy of those business owners and their employees, most of whom face a very uncertain future.

Never has the distinction been more clear in Boothe-Schmidt’s worldview than what we now see during this pandemic. There are the working families who create revenue in the private sector. Then, there are the working families that consume revenue in the public sector.

Despite any claims to the contrary, Boothe-Schmidt’s recent abandonment of our local union workers and her acceptance of enormous SEIU/AFSCME Portland money speaks loudly and clearly for itself. She does not support policies that will protect our local businesses. Next time, ask Boothe-Schmidt to specifically define what she means by “working families.” And, if you own or work for a local business, think twice about voting for someone who will continue to bleed you dry when it comes to making sure that her backers never miss a beat.

CYNTHIA MALKOWSKI
Seaside

Our role

So appreciate Brianne Lee’s letter on Aug. 22 about the salmon, orcas, dam removal and a better plan for the environment.

Money seems to rule, and we ignore creatures that we can’t see as part of our whole web of life. We want to point fingers at the sea lions for eating too many fish, so we’re going to allow killing the sea lions. When can humanity look at our role in all of it?

We can’t just throw money at the problem, and expect it to get fixed that way. We dam rivers and are overfishing the oceans and rivers. All through history humans just go in and take, because it’s what is desired, even if nature is extremely disrupted and other humans are displaced, or their cultures gouged.

We need plans that are best for everyone and everything, even if it means sacrificing some of what is wanted on the part of humans — with eyes on future generations and what they’re going to have in their lives.

ROBIN RODGERS
Astoria

‘The Prince’

Written in 1513, “The Prince” today is regarded as the first modern work of political science. Niccolò Machiavelli wrote it from his farm after being released from prison, where he had been brutally tortured.

“The Prince” featured two men. The first was the ascetic Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola, who railed against the corruption of the papacy and vices of the Florentines. He ruled Florence for four years after the expulsion of the Medici. He was ousted in 1498; he was hanged and his body burned.

Machiavelli called him the “Unarmed Prophet,” with his ability to adapt his message to the circumstances and act in accordance with the times, and color his lies accordingly. But, words alone were not enough to secure power. Force was necessary to keep a firm grip.

“The Prince” was written about the bastard son of Pope Alexander VI. His name was Cesare Borgia. A brilliant strategist, Cesare was able to assemble his own state in Italy. When rivals were against him, Cesare plotted revenge by luring them to the fortress of Senigallia, where he ordered them killed.

Machiavelli wrote that an effective prince knows when to use violence to retain power. A great leader, Machiavelli argued, must be able to conquer by force or fraud. Previously, princely conduct was guided on how a ruler gains power through his or her right and legitimacy to rule.

For Machiavelli, however, rightful or legitimate is irrelevant if the ruler cannot hold on to his or her power. Which would mean — the end justifies the means.

TERRY J. SMITH
Warrenton

We can do better

Alexander Jimenez did not need to die. I did not know him, but I was very upset by a recent article in The Astorian reporting his death while in police custody.

Alexander was a veteran who suffered from schizophrenia and drug addiction. The police knew him, and believed he was having a mental breakdown the day he died. He was someone who was in need of mental health professionals, not the tasing, force and restraints used by police.

I think this local incident should have us all questioning why the solution to someone having a mental health emergency is to restrain them and take them to jail. The death is exactly why there is a movement for defunding the police.

Not as a means of abolishing the police, but to implement more effective methods of providing safety and security to our community — including the safety and security of the individual having the breakdown.

It is far too easy to look away when you hear about a drug addict dying in police custody. I think we can do better.

MONICA PEARSON
Astoria