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IN ONE EAR • ELLEDA WILSON

FISHY FENCE



Fun rerun: Ken Mittelbuscher, owner of the Crosby House Bed and Breakfast, came up with a creative way to solve a neighborhood problem.

“In an effort to **slow traffic down on Bond Street**, where I live, I painted a big sign and mounted it to a pole,” he explained. “It’s a warning — ‘Kiddie Corner.’ Unfortunately, that sign no longer deters the commuters at 5 p.m., or much at any other time ...”

Undeterred, he decided to build an eye-catching fence. “I notice as I worked on the fence, cars slowed and people even pulled over to gaze at my fence as they talked on cell phones,” Ken recalled.

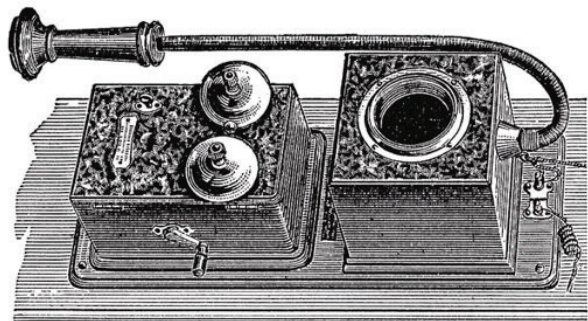
“I realized my creative fence was getting attention. Specifically, they asked questions, and wanted to talk, as I was attempting to make adjustments — there were many.

“I decided to cut the shapes of whales out of cedar fencing boards. I couldn’t find the size, shape and poses I wanted. Instead, I went with fish.

“What I now call ‘**The Fish Fence**’ is completed on Bond Street ... (A moon was added because of its) impact on the tides, and the tides’ effects on fish ...”

“Not only did the project come out OK,” he added, “traffic passes at a slower pace.” Mission accomplished. (*In One Ear*, 3/3/2017)

LOCAL BREVITIES



TELEPHONES
For Short Private Lines,
MAGNETO CALL-BELLS, Etc.

From The Daily Astorian, March 4, 1884:

• On the Oregon yesterday came Mr. Brown with the material and apparatus for the construction of the **telephone system** of communication, which is intended to save us many steps this summer. The work of putting it up begins today.

It was reported yesterday evening that the central office will be across the street from The Astorian office, and will be in charge of **F. C. Norris**, who formerly manipulated the wires of the Western Union Telegraph Co.

• **Note:** A steamboat captain, **George Ainsworth**, brought the **first telephone** to Oregon in 1878, and the first phone line connected his office and home in **Portland**. The new gadget didn’t take long to catch on, and by the fall of that same year, there were almost 100 phones in the City of Roses.

Incidentally, the busy captain also founded Ainsworth, British Columbia, in 1883. (bit.ly/AstPhone, bit.ly/ainsworthBC)

BIG AS A BARBECUE



“I have a nautical mystery,” **Reba Owen** of Seaside wrote. “A large **buoy** washed up in front of our cabin at **Falcon Cove**. It has numbers and letters **PLA-V**, check mark 320. Can you mention it in your column? I would like to know what it is, and where it came from.

“I think it’s about 3 feet by 4 feet, with handles on each end, and made of black heavy plastic ... It is as big as a barbecue.”

The Ear, as usual, turned to the fount of information, the Astoria Oregon: Culture, Tales And History Facebook page. The consensus is that Reba’s find is a boat fender, possibly belonging to a tug.

Reba is concerned and wants to do the right thing. “I would like to return it to the owner,” she added, “because it is still usable.”

If you know the owner of Reba’s find, please contact the Ear at 971-704-1718 or ewilson@dailyastorian.com

VAMPIRA’S SECRETS



Early in February, KATU interviewed **Sandra Niemi** about her revealing biography of her aunt, famed horror host **Vampira**, “**Glamour Ghoul: The Passions and Pain of the Real Vampira, Maila Nurmi**,” who was an Astoria High School graduate (bit.ly/NiemiNurmi).

The book is mainly based on her aunt’s diaries and notes and family stories. The book is available online. Sandra is pictured, inset, courtesy of KATU.

Maila moved to Los Angeles in 1941, determined to become successful and rich. But she wasn’t really noticed until she won a masquerade ball with an early **Vampira**-like costume — which she designed and sewed herself — and was invited to appear on KABC in L.A. She developed the wasp-waisted **Vampira** persona, and her career was on its way.

The book contains some interesting tidbits about Maila’s life. For one thing, she was friends with Oscar-winning actor **Marlon Brando** for 30 years. She also had a close platonic relationship with iconic actor **James Dean**. Maila had given up a child for adoption at age 20, and, missing her son, she “adopted” Dean, whose mother died when he was young.

Maila didn’t want to do **Ed Wood’s** movie “**Plan 9 from Outer Space**” (bit.ly/Plan9ugh), well-known as one of the worst movies ever made, but agreed only on the condition that she stay mute. She thought — correctly — that the dialogue she was given was “inane.”

And, the big secret: She was pregnant with **Orson Welles’** child, but couldn’t reach him to tell him. It was then announced on the radio that he had married **Rita Hayworth**. She and her mother took the train to New York, where her father lived. Maila had the baby there and gave him up for adoption.

Sandra found Maila’s son online, with the help of a DNA test and Ancestry.com. He lives in Vermont and was an attorney for 50 years.

Since he wanted to know who his mother was, Sandra told him. “Oh my gosh!” he replied. “I’ve waited 75 years to know who my mother is, and I find out she’s a vampire!”

CHASING CHESSMAN

Astorian **Robert Clark** wonders what happened to the largest of **Astoria’s ferries**, the **M. R. Chessman**. Good question.

Capt. Fritz Elfving, who started the Astoria ferry service to Megler, Washington, retired and sold the business to **Merle R. Chessman** in 1946. Chessman sold the operation to the Oregon State Highway Department that same year. Constructed in 1947, the steel-built Chessman — unlike the previous ferries, which were wooden — plied the waters of the ferry route from 1948 to 1966.

Once the **Astoria Bridge** was completed in 1966, there was no longer any need for a ferry service to get across the river. The Chessman made the final ferry run for the little fleet — at almost full capacity, with 445 passengers — on July 28, 1966. After cobbling together a few — often conflicting — sources, the rest of the ferry’s story seems to go as follows:

In 1968, the U.S. Navy bought the Chessman for \$300,000, and transferred the vessel to **South Vietnam**. Her name was changed to HQ9602 and Lieu Lo II. She was stationed at the Naval Intermediate Support Base **Cat Lai** on the Dong Nai River east of **Saigon**. In 1971, Cat Lai was handed over to the South Vietnamese; the ferry was sold and turned into a machine shop.

North Vietnam took over Saigon in 1975, including the Cat Lai facility, which was not damaged in the process. The Vietnamese navy really didn’t need the place, so it was used for storage. Over the years, the facility fell into disuse, was finally bulldozed in the early 2000s and turned into a shipping container yard.

What happened to the M. R. Chessman? No one really seems to know, for certain. Most likely, she was scrapped. But wouldn’t it be fun if she turned up somewhere?

(bit.ly/chessman1, bit.ly/chessman2, bit.ly/chessman3, bit.ly/chessman4, “Water Under the Bridge” by Bob Duke)



BAD, BAD TIMING



Willamette Week recently wrote about an **Oregon Health Authority public service announcement** on TV promoting **social distancing** that probably could not have had worse timing. (bit.ly/PSAgaaffe)

In the ad, a fishing boat crew realizes they unwittingly have one extra man aboard. A large splash implies he was tossed overboard to comply with social distancing guidelines — which was obviously meant to be amusing.

At the end of the video, you can see that he’s fine — the crew tossed him into a life boat that is being towed behind them. You can see the PSA at bit.ly/PSAgaaffe2; a screenshot is shown.

The mayor of Newport, **Dean Sawyer**, took offense (maybe he didn’t see the end?) and complained in a letter to **Gov. Kate Brown** that the ad is “very insensitive and disturbing to the families of our local fishing fleet.”

Especially since two men died recently when a fishing boat capsized Feb. 20 on the Tillamook Bay bar.

The health authority promptly apologized, sent condolences to the families and pulled the offending ad which was, incidentally, filmed in January.

LANGUISHING LAMPREY



Recently, **Ally Blevins** and her family found a very interesting visitor in their backyard: a lamprey,” recalled **Tiffany Boothe**, of the **Seaside Aquarium** (seasideaquarium.com). Tiffany provided the lamprey photo.

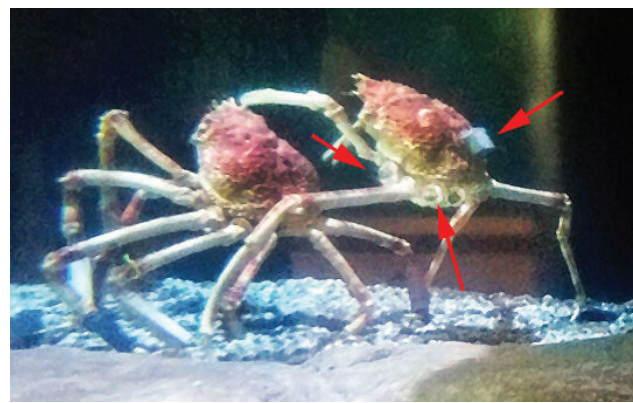
“It appeared that this slimy, slithering creature had fallen out of the sky and landed in their yard. They contacted the aquarium, and the general manager, **Keith Chandler**, rushed over to see what was going on.

“He quickly recovered the small eel, and put it into a cooler full of salt water. The lamprey had small talon marks along its side, and though it had been out of water for some time, was still alive. So just how did it get there?”

“It is suspected that it was seized out of the water by either an eagle or, more likely, an osprey. Unfortunately, the little lamprey succumbed to the injuries it incurred while being held captive by whatever bird of prey snatched it up.

“It’s an unusual backyard find,” Tiffany noted, “to say the least.”

GRACE AND VERVE



The Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport reports that one of their large **spider crabs** found herself in a very awkward situation: She lost a few legs during molting.

Which really isn’t as strange as it sounds, when you realize that these crabs can weigh up to 44 pounds and can reach 13 feet across from leg tip to leg tip. The leg length can make molting quite tricky, and legs can get damaged.

Never fear, after a little research, the aquarium staff came up with an ingenious solution for the off-balance crustacean. They attached **yoga block foam** strategically on her shell near the **lost legs**. The aquarium made her more buoyant, thereby putting less pressure on her remaining legs. A photo of her new look is shown, courtesy of the aquarium.

“Once returned to the exhibit, she began walking with grace and verve,” aquarium staffer **Evonne Mochon-Collura** wrote in an update. “Her motions are stable and effortless.” (bit.ly/OCAcrab)