

OPINION

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SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

‘I am done with you shuffling me’

SEASIDE — After a city crack-down on Necanicum Drive near 12th Avenue earlier this year, residents in Seaside say that people living in RVs have moved across the street to Goodman Park.

The park’s popularity as a place to shelter grew after overnight street parking prohibitions and increased ticketing. Many nearby residents are incensed. They say the camp is illegal and endangers the area’s health, safety and property values.



R.J. MARX

Residents of the park say it is their right. D.C. Clouds, who lives in the lot, stepped forward to discuss her experience as a homeless person. We met at the Seaside Lodge and International Hostel.

Q: How did you step up to become a voice of the streets?

A: I’m not trying to be, you know, ‘that guy,’ but I just got tired of us not having somebody to represent us from the level of the streets. So I said enough, I’ll do it. The lack of representation from our level is fear. Fear for our safety, fear for, you know, where we might exist. This overwhelming fear between the community themselves and the police.

There’s so many different levels that you have to be watching out for that — it makes it just overwhelming. For somebody like myself, who does not have any addictions. I’m getting shoved in places that are filled with addicts. And it just becomes this state of misery. They’re taking people’s dignity away from them.

Q: Where are you from?

A: Originally, Maryland.

Q: How old are you?

A: 36.

Q: What do you do?

A: I’m a groundskeeper here. I’ve worked with the street community. I’ve got a job I don’t get paid for, I mean, I work my tail off.

Q: Do you hear success stories from others?

A: Sir, I used to be a drug dealer and now I volunteer in your community. I am the success story. Yeah. Straight out with it. We take care of ourselves out here. We really do. We are a street community. We are a community with or without the walls, with or without the doorknobs. We are a community.

Q: Do you divide the people on the street that you can help and the ones



Sharon Johnson, left, of Love on the Streets, with D.C. Clouds.

that you can’t?

A: It’s not a division. You can help everybody to ascend.

Q: You just give them the services that they need in each particular instance is what you’re saying?

A: I sharpen the tools they already have. I dust off the stuff that they already know, but has just been piled upon with people’s opinions and perspectives of what the homeless community is. I’m not the only one out here with intelligence. I’m not the only one out here with the business license or the capability to come and speak to you or reach out to you.

Q: I first met you at one of the city’s homeless forums at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.

A: That was a joke. This is the result of that. This is the result of draggin’ feet ... This is the result of ‘we’ll get to it next time.’ So where do we go? What’s the other option here? Oh, there isn’t one. It’s survive as you can. A lot of people think that if somebody yells at us that we can just pack up our lives and move away.

If you have a normal setting, yeah, that’s normal. But when your life is in this, you got to think about the money for the gas, finding somebody with the jumper box if you don’t have one. All

these little things are time-consuming.

Q: When did you get here?

A: I landed back in town on June 27. I arrived in town with three outfits in my book bag, and a hope and a prayer that I can keep doing what I do. I slept on Seaside Museum’s property. And to the point I came down to this lot. I then obtained a car. So now I’m living in a car and then went from there onto that trailer.

Q: How did you end up in the lot on 11th?

A: The community kept calling us ugly and undignified and how horrible critters we have to be to be parked along the lovely Necanicum like that, because we’re blocking their million-dollar river view, right?

Not worried about the pollution in the trash that comes from the crabbing community and the tourist community here but the few folks that are just simply trying to be in a safe existence. They’re worried about the prettiness of it. I was the first person living in that gravel lot. I parked in that gravel lot with my book bag, my car and my trailer.

I said, ‘You’re not going to shuffle me any longer.’ I am done with you shuffling me. I am done with losing jobs, vehicles, opportunities, because every time I turn around, I can’t just go sim-

ply to work. I have to worry about you orange sticker-ing in my car or one of your city workers deciding to tell me that they’re gonna remove the vehicle themselves, because they don’t like it.

I’m not here for what you like, I’m here to be a productive member of your society. And in the same sense being refused to allow to do that simple thing. There was no government officials really trying to help just wanting to talk a lot. This wasn’t CCA (Clatsop Community Action), CBH (Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare) or the homeless liaison people. I said, I’m not moving no more.

Q: You met with Police Chief Dave Ham about use of this lot?

A: I went across the chief’s mind with the whole idea, to stop ticketing us on Necanicum. ‘If you want this to look prettier, meet me in the middle. You stop the tickets, I’ll make it look prettier.’ He stopped the tickets. It looks prettier. We’re a clean camp. We have people that have addictions. We have people who have disabilities. We have people that know where they’re wanting to go. We have people that don’t know what the hell they’re going. But in the day, we coexist.

There are very minimal police calls to that lot. We’re trying to take away that stereotypical: ‘Oh, you must have done something horrible in life to be outside.’

Q: Do you have a message for the community at large?

A: I’ll be damned if I watch other people from the street community be bullied by your ignorance. Is it your own personal fear of how close you are to becoming homeless yourself that makes you act so negative? Not one person on the Necanicum is asking for a free ride. Before you go making assumptions about what exactly is happening please come talk to me, please.

A little bit about this camp — it’s proof the street community wants to help themselves. That lot is an example of how multiple lifestyles and lifestyle choices can live together and coexist. I am asking for safety and basic human rights. Where is our humanity? And don’t dare say anything about importing homeless people. Those folks on that lot is y’all’s lots.

Q: How do you bridge the gap between the campers and the neighbors?

A: By doing what we’re doing right here.

R.J. Marx is the South County reporter for The Astorian and editor of the Seaside Signal.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Crumbling infrastructure

When I read that the barricaded causeway at the East Mooring Basin had slumped into the river, I immediately realized that sea otters were undoubtedly implicated.

I was mistaken to be critical of the Port of Astoria Commission when they voted unanimously to endorse a letter written by the West Coast Seafood Processors Association warning the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to consider the potential issues for port infrastructure in reintroducing sea otters anywhere on the entire Pacific Coast of the U.S.

Otters are agile, and can run quickly, and they say river otters can even climb trees. Otters move about on land with an awkward humping, thumping gait, and no doubt a mother otter in a big hurry with her litter of kids caused the causeway to collapse. I hope none were hurt.

I wish to retract my earlier criticism of the Port Commission.

GARY DURHEIM
Seaside

Safety

Seeing the article about school bus drivers (The Astorian, Oct. 2) reminded me of what happened one morning a week or two ago in that downhill, tight little S-curve on Irving Avenue between 26th and 23rd streets.

I was heading west, had just gone down into that S-curve, when I saw the big yellow school bus, going full speed and slightly over the double-yellow line into my lane. There’s no shoulder there. I felt a tiny jolt and heard the sound of metal scraping on metal for the entire length of that bus.

I am not a nervous, timid nor beginning driver. I carefully drove on to where I could pull over. After a few deep breaths, I got out and saw that my outside driver’s side mirror was flattened against the body of the car with a deep scratch on it. No other damage. Whew! I went on my way. No, the bus did not stop.

Could someone please remind these,

and other future school bus drivers, that the safety of those children is so much more important than getting there in time?

CATHERINE MARTIN
Astoria

Bizarre game

The “Fire chiefs worry about staff exodus” article (The Astorian, Sept. 25) is an alarm sounding for Clatsop County residents.

When I was younger, I was a volunteer firefighter in Arizona with state professional firefighter, hazmat, emergency medical technician and fire instructor certifications and 15 years of service. I speak from experience.

That these emergency service providers have been permitted to take this anti-medical science stance calls into question their department’s ability to deliver safe, competent emergency medical care of any kind. Seriously, what other medical science or safety practices do these people reject, and why does their leadership (and peers) let them?

Perhaps county residents should ask their governmental leaders what codes and laws they actually enforce? All of them? Or can their staffs pick and choose according to their personal beliefs? Is protecting the health and safety of the community they serve only a suggested option?

Medical science has provided us with a proven safe and effective vaccine to combat this deadly pandemic. Yet some emergency personnel are choosing to play a bizarre game of COVID Russian roulette, and some local leaders appear willing to hand them the gun.

Sooner or later, the hammer will fall on a loaded chamber, and the public will suffer as a consequence. Consider the liability issue. Can taxpayers afford the lawsuits that will result when, not if, an unvaccinated public servant infects someone while on the job?

If the anti-vaxxers would rather walk than do what’s right, let them. We’ll all be safer in the long run.

BILL GRAFFIUS
Gearhart



“Everything’s going great except, you know, *everything*.”

LETTERS WELCOME

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