

CONTACT US
Lissa Brewer
lbrewer@dailyastorian.com

WEEKEND BREAK



FOLLOW US
facebook.com/
DailyAstorian



Mount St. Helens erupted May 18, 1980, sending millions of tons of ash skyward. Much of it landed on farmland, destroying or damaging many crops.

IN THE MOUNTAIN'S SHADOW

Reflecting on Mount St. Helens through a local journey

By **RON BALDWIN**
For The Astorian

According to the Klickitat people, the creator had spoken. He was furious with his sons, who led his people to opposite sides of the great river.

Wy'east and Pahto led warriors against one another over the love of Loo-wit, a woman who could not decide between the two. Seeing his people perish at the hands of their own kin, the creator flew into a rage, casting all three into stone in the form of the great fire mountains that dominate the horizon, so the legend tells.

The Cowlitz, Yakama, Multnomah and Chinook tribes gave their own names and stories to the towering peaks. When Capt. George Vancouver entered the Columbia, he gave two of them names that he thought would serve him best in the British Royal Navy.

Wy'east became Mount Hood, after Adm. Samuel Hood, and Loo-wit became Mount St. Helens after the ambassador to the Spanish court Baron St. Helens. Pahto, now known as Mount Adams, would wait another 70 years to take the name of the United States' second president.

Mountains have captured the imagination and awe of humankind since the dawn of time. Nearly every culture has ascribed some spiritual significance to the peaks in their realm. Often, a mountain serves as the setting of a creation story, or some physical manifestation of a spirit, god or goddess. For lower Columbians, Mount St. Helens is a constant presence, whether you can see the mountain or not. On a clear day,

it can be seen from nearly anywhere on the river, sporting varied cloaks. It reigns over the landscape, silent and peaceful for now.

The catastrophic eruption of May 18, 1980, changed everything. The classic Cascadian dome, considered by many to be the most beautiful of the Cascade stratovolcanoes, was blown off in one of the deadliest and most destructive volcanic events in American history. This was not the first time the mountain had blown its top. Geologic records reveal many more, and many Indigenous tribes have told stories about its fiery events. Not many alive at the time will forget where they were when the mountain lost its temper.

Most lower Columbia locations had a dusting of fine, gritty ash, but the blast was to the north and the prevailing winds buried the lands northeast of the blast zone in as much as 5 inches of ash. The blast zone was devastated. Trees were incinerated in seconds and millions of logs from surrounded forests washed down the Toutle and Cowlitz rivers before filling the Columbia, along with a mixture of ash and pyroclastic mud.

Life downstream was forever changed. River commerce came to a stop for a time. The incalculable damage resulted in years of dredging, construction and countless human and financial costs before the Columbia returned to its pristine state. Having spent many school days in Longview, Mount St. Helens was always right over our shoulders, in winter dazzling white and in summer stripped and bare.

**THE CATASTROPHIC
ERUPTION OF MAY
18, 1980, CHANGED
EVERYTHING. THE
CLASSIC CASCADIAN
DOME, CONSIDERED
BY MANY TO BE THE
MOST BEAUTIFUL
OF THE CASCADE
STRATOVOLCANOES,
WAS BLOWN OFF
IN ONE OF THE
DEADLIEST AND
MOST DESTRUCTIVE
VOLCANIC EVENTS IN
AMERICAN HISTORY.**

See Mountain, Page B5