

EDITORIAL

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The Portland Observer

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p e r s p e c t i v e s

What Could Be More Interesting Than "A History of Reading," III

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

Since I closed last week's article with a 'page-image' from Herman Melville's classic, "Moby Dick" ("like a painted ship, upon a painted sea"), I thought, why not draw again from the poetic prose he used to describe the pursuit of "The Great White Whale?" Melville engraves a permanent place in the readers mind and in the 'history of reading'-when he brings one's ear to interact with his visual description of the port city from which Captain Ahab launched his ill-fated adventure.

Had this gifted writer so very early on developed a 'literary virtual reality?' "...the salty lick and lap of the sea, at the foot of every cross-town street?"

Can you not hear, see, and smell the reality of this New England town. The word-artist has left an indelible imprint on a receptive mind; a master craftsman has painted a word-picture that the reader may recall and enjoy forever. This is why there are those of

us who indict today's education system for failure to equip so many children with adequate reading skills; intellectually starved.

Of course, we have it on good authority that 'Homer,' the famed Greek bard was illiterate, though, as Alberta Manguel tells us in his "History of Reading" (Viking, 1996), his admiring listeners transcribed poems like the "Iliad" onto parchment scrolls-24 in the particular case. They were distributed throughout all known lands.

A "scroll" is an interesting device for conveying a written message; in the third grade we wrote horizontal messages on long strips of paper, such that they could be wound between two sticks-gradually revealing the entire message by winding or unwinding the sticks.

We, like the Greeks, called this "scrolling," and interestingly, the technique of retrieving stoned information in your computer is still called "scrolling." Of course, that is a vertical process as opposed to horizontal; but as

early as 1979 I had a handheld Texas Instrument calculator on which one could horizontally scroll an almost infinite number of decimal places. I was never sure of the accuracy.

Manguel goes on to recite an informative and fascinating story of the development of books as we know them. Clay tablets of legal codes became "codexes" which could be hand-held. Papyrus was too brittle to be folded into booklets, but parchment or vellum (animal skins) could be cut or folded into all sorts of shapes and sizes.

Our author provides us with much of the history of 'books' in the ancient world of Greece, Rome, and Mesopotamia (Middle East-Iran, Iraq). The Egyptian development centers around the fairly 'late' developments at the famous library at Alexandria.

Manguel skirts the seminal contributions of the Africans and obviously, begins his story with the conventional European treatment. Thus, you will not find commentary on the

famed "Rosetta Stone" whose parallel inscriptions in three languages permitted modern man to learn of the wonders and grandeur of ancient Egypt: Hieroglyphic, Demotic and Greek texts.

But then again this book is not about the particular technical or cultural contributions of mankind over a long-time line of 'recorded' history. But, instead, is about the devices and techniques that various peoples and organizations used to record and pass on information about the world as they knew it; religious, secular, scientific and philosophical.

You will be inspired to read further, inspired to follow up the many little gems of knowledge that have been revealed. But I think that most important of all, you will be highly motivated to join the current drive to raise the reading levels of our school children. "Phonics" is 'where its at' and where it has always been. They must not be deprived of the great gift of literacy.

each year, our communities need stronger protections.

We need to expand our right to know about the chemicals that place our health and our families at risk.

I urge you to support strengthening Oregon's toxics reporting laws so we can fully track the flow of chemicals through industrial facilities in our state.

We need to set strong statewide reporting standards while respecting the right of local communities to obtain the information they need. These steps will help us to reduce chemical use and prevent pollution.

I know polluters and big chemical users will be pressuring you to oppose strengthening Oregon's toxics reporting laws. Please put your support behind increasing the rights of Oregonians to information about harmful substances in our communities.

For more information, please contact me for references including Our Stolen Future by Theo Colborn, Dianne Dumanoski and John Peterson Myers (foreword by Vice President Al Gore).

Sincerely
Penny Okamoto

Letter To The Editor

Send your letters to the Editor to:
Editor, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

Letter to Editor
Representative Chuck
Carpenter
State Capital Building
Salem, Oregon 97310
Dear Mr. Carpenter,

As a citizen of Oregon and a nursing mother, I am concerned about the increasing number of toxic chemicals in Oregon's environment. Many of these chemicals have been linked with cancer, birth defects, and other problems, while most have not even been fully tested for health effects. The well-publicized disastrous consequences of pregnant women who were given diethylstilbestrol (DES) in the 1950s and 1960s are just the tip of the iceberg. Mr. Carpenter, I am a biologist, not a

Luddite, nor an alarmist. I just want the facts about the chemicals I use. What chemicals accumulate in body fat? What chemicals will I pass to my baby while nursing? I have a right to know.

Citizens currently have access to limited information about some toxic chemicals in our communities, but Oregon's right to know law has become outdated. With 72,000 synthetic chemicals already in use and 1000 more being added

Remembering Our Heroes

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

I'm not sure if it was the way the Fourth of July hit me this year, as I re-read Frederick Douglass' speech asking what Independence Day meant to people who were not free. Or maybe it was just the fact that I have seen several stories about those heroes and sheroes of the civil rights movement and what is happening to them now. Or maybe it's because I've been reading several new books about the civil rights movement and so the names are fresh on my mind. But whatever the reason, I find that I want to salute them now-giving them their roses while they can still smell them. So I'm going to take two columns to remember some of our patriots, our warriors for justice.

James Lawson

One of those who was so instrumental in the civil rights movement, but whose name is mostly unknown is James Lawson. An Ohioan by birth, Lawson was an Oberlin College theology student when he met Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It was a meeting which probably changed both of their lives.

Lawson had decided as a child that there was a better way than violence. He remembers his mother's questioning him upon his report of having slapped a small white child who had called him a nigger. She asked him simply, "What good did that do?" he said that everything in his life seemed to change at that moment and as his

mother talked to him about how much he was loved, by God and his family and how unimportant name calling was in the whole scheme of his life. He made a vow to himself never, if possible, to hit anyone again.

In the late 1940's, as a college student at Baldwin-Wallace College outside of Cleveland, Lawson's world expanded and he became aware of another world composed of people of color. He had already become an activist, having staged several sit-ins as a teenager and while in college he joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an ecumenical peace organization. His commitment to peace deepened and in his senior year of college, with the Korean War raging, he refused to seek an ministerial deferral or conscientious objector's status and went to prison for refusing to be drafted. he used his prison term to re-read and study Gandhi's writing on non-violence.

A year later Lawson returned to Baldwin Wallace to finish his degree and was sent by the Methodist church to India to work in a Presbyterian college. His time in India deepened his commitment to non-violence and the teachings of Gandhi and gave him a broader sense of the world. When he read about Dr. King and the Montgomery bus boycott, Lawson knew it was time to return.

Shortly after his arrival, James Lawson met Dr. King and began a ten year career of teaching non-violence to students and others in the civil

rights movement. In the early years Dr. King himself studied under Lawson. A brilliant but quiet man, Lawson taught the students the basic principles of non-violence: that they had the power of moral right on their side and that power could bring down the walls of segregation; that they must understand at the very core of their being that they were created by God and that there was no shame in being black in white America; that love would always conquer hate.

Lawson then taught his students what to expect on the picket lines and how to protect each other and themselves from the violence which would surely come. He prepared them to hear epithets and threats. He tried to immunize them against the anger and violence and to center them on God's love.

Lawson himself led dozens, perhaps hundreds of sit-ins and marches during his days with the movement. He endured many many beatings and yet his own commitment to non-violence never waned. It was Lawson who taught his students by word and example about "the beloved community," a phrase he often used to mean the place where barriers between humans came down and where people tried to address society's most difficult problems.

Today James Lawson serves as a United Methodist pastor in Los Angeles. He is truly an unsung hero of the civil rights movement and this nation owes him a great debt of gratitude.



Just think: Your son is bright, healthy and headed for college one day. You love the direction your career has taken. You're doing a lot of the things you planned and even a few you didn't. Living life to the fullest is easy when you have family behind you. American Family Insurance. Call and talk to one of our helpful, friendly agents. You'll find out why we're consistently rated A+ (Superior) by A.M. Best, the insurance rating authority. Then, go on. Dream. Plan. What you do next is up to you and we'll be here to help you.

You have family behind you.

All Your Protection Under One Roof.



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