

Quick takes

Hermiston teen over Twitter with 7-Eleven senior pics

So you’re definitely getting your own page this year for the yearbook @Stefano_Peiris. Breaking records man.
— @Cass_Cassbeann

@Stefano_Peiris is a Hermiston legend.
— @JesseSmithjs

I’m so honored to know someone as Twitter famous as @Stefano_Peiris and the fact his mom gives me free slurpees at a famous store.
— @meyers_hayden

I’m famous. Someone be my homecoming date now.
— @Stefano_Peiris

Food donated to needy

This is my community: a group of “quiet” donors coming together to harvest, ship and process 250,000 pounds or 125 tons of potatoes to help the hungry, food that would have been plowed under otherwise.
— Eric Reise

It would be great if everyone would do that. Stop wasting food in the field and let others have it.
— Julie Scherbarth

Is ‘illegal alien’ outdated?

Illegal alien is an accurate, race-neutral phrase that was not coined with Latinos in mind. The reason it has come to be associated with Latinos in recent years is due to the fact that most of this country’s illegal alien population is Latino.
— Freedom1958

If they immigrated here against the laws. I think illegal immigrant is a correct term. It’s not like they lost their documents, they never had legal documents to lose.
— Just_thinking_out Loud

I believe undocumented immigrant is the correct term. Human beings aren’t “illegal” and they are certainly not aliens.
— E O Reader

Q&A: Being transgender in Eastern Oregon

Alex Radford, 28, is a Umatilla tribal member who lives in Pendleton. He was born Athena Radford, and for the last two months has been transitioning his gender from female to male. He spoke with opinion page editor Tim Trainor for the EO Audio podcast, which you can listen to on iTunes or by visiting eastoregonian.com/eo/podcasts. We include an excerpt here. To listen to it in its entirety, search EO Audio on iTunes or Stitcher.



TT: Why don’t you give us a little background information about yourself. Where did you grow up?

AR: I grew up on the Umatilla Indian Reservation outside Mission.

TT: What were you like as a child?

AR: I was really shy as a child, until about third grade, second grade. I would say I had a lot of anger issues. I was really aggressive. Very hyper, too. Very outgoing, social.

TT: What was your gender, and how did you see yourself at that time?

AR: I think I was about 5 or 6 years old, and I asked my dad “When am I going to grow my penis?” And he said, “You’re not. You’re a girl.” I remember kind of having a meltdown after that. I guess I’ve always known I was not a girl, but I was obviously taught to suppress that, to accept that I’m a female biologically.

TT: What happened then, as you grew up and understood more about yourself and how the world works?

AR: I guess I came to accept myself. It was 2010 and I was in college and I was away from home. There was transgender people there, and one of my teachers was transgender —from female to male. I couldn’t stop myself from wanting to ask him questions. It was like this light bulb that went off. It suddenly sparked my interest in a really intense way, kind of like when I accepted my sexuality — being attracted to women.

TT: How did you make the decision to transition?

AR: The short version is I realized I needed to change my identity, when it

comes to female. I knew I didn’t want to be perceived as just female. From 2010 to 2012, I was questioning my gender a lot. I didn’t want to make a huge decision right off the bat. I wanted to educate myself and learn more about myself to know if I wanted to take hormones, just have the surgery for my chest. I didn’t know what I wanted, I just knew that I wasn’t a female.

TT: How do you explain that feeling to people who never had to question their gender?

AR: I answer that question a lot. The best way I can describe is that when you’re driving a car, and the driver of that car is a female and your car is very much male. I feel like I’ve been hijacked. You’re in the wrong body, my brain doesn’t match my body. That’s a hard thing to express if you’ve never gone through it.

TT: How do you explain yourself to people who think drastic changes of a surgical or biological nature are unnecessary?

AR: I have very close loved ones who don’t agree with me. They don’t think I need to change my name, that I should just accept that I’m female. That’s just how the world works. I already accepted that a long time ago. I totally embrace everybody, whether they agree with me or not. We’re not all the same. We don’t always have to understand each other to care about each other, and to celebrate each other’s happiness and successes.

TT: What is the transition process like?

AR: The process is basically self-acceptance. It started in college in 2010, when I came out to myself. In 2012, I announced that I was going to go through with hormone replacement therapy. I didn’t start hormone replacement therapy until about two months ago. In Oregon you have to get a letter from a therapist diagnosing you with gender identity disorder, or gender dysphoria.

TT: How have you changed in two months?

AR: Physically? My hair on my chin



Radford

is beginning to grow. Just a little peach fuzz, nothing major, which is kind of disappointing. But I think that’s just because I’m Native and Natives don’t have a lot of facial hair. I don’t know, my scent has changed a lot, stronger. My face has changed a little bit, and my waist is changing. My fat distribution is changing. My arm muscles feel more useful. My legs are starting to fill out, my pants are starting to fit looser. Obviously, my voice has changed, it’s deeper.

TT: And what about emotionally?

AR: Definitely shorter-fused. I have a lower tolerance for a lot of things I use be really passive about.

TT: Do you feel like a different person?

AR: No. I feel like I’m learning different characteristics about myself that were always there that are taking a stronger stance in my life. I don’t have the same emotional reaction to things that used to hurt me.

How I process things is different, but I don’t see the world differently. I don’t have a whole different personality. I’m still a major dork and I love to laugh and I love hanging out with my friends.

—Hear the rest at EO Audio



Oregon must combat higher threat of fire

As we near the end of a third consecutive costly fire season, the aftermath is staggering. Some 2,218 wildfires burned more than 600,000 acres across the state and threatened more than 1,400 homes and structures. More than 10,000 firefighters across the Pacific Northwest risked their lives fighting these fires, and ensuring that they could respond swiftly, with all available resources, I invoked the Emergency Conflagration Act five times. Because of the great work of many, we were prepared to minimize loss during these challenging months.

On behalf of all Oregonians, I thank the thousands of firefighters and support crews from local, state and federal agencies, tribal governments, the contract community, local first responders, landowners, forestry professionals and others who ensured that not one life was lost in Oregon. Other states were not so fortunate. Your dedicated service to our state is never taken for granted, and is greatly appreciated.

Even though wildfire season is winding down, now is the time for Oregonians to begin thinking about next summer’s fire season and prepare for the rains of winter. This is the best way to express our appreciation for the risks that Oregon’s firefighters experience every year.

For those who lost homes and property, state and local officials are working hard to help you put the pieces back together. There are several resources, ranging from streamlined permitting processes to financial



KATE BROWN
Comment

Wildfire, drought, and the myriad of challenges resulting from climate change have likely introduced our state to a new normal.

Wildfire, drought, and the myriad of challenges resulting from climate change have likely introduced our state to a new normal. As preventing and fighting fire becomes more complex, we must rethink our approach, adopting strategies for both wet and dry seasons. Addressing and preventing fire damage is a year-round effort, and it is more important than ever to work together to adapt to climate change and protect our way of life now and for tomorrow.

Kate Brown is the governor of Oregon.

Schools for wisdom

Friends of mine have been raving about the documentary “Most Likely to Succeed,” and it’s easy to see what the excitement is about. The film is a bold indictment of the entire K-12 educational system.

Greg Whiteley’s documentary argues that the American school system is ultimately built on a Prussian model designed over 100 years ago. Its main activity is downloading content into students’ minds, with success or failure measured by standardized tests. This lecture and textbook method leaves many children bored and listless.

Worse, it is unsuited for the modern workplace. Information is now ubiquitous. You can look up any fact on your phone. A computer can destroy Ken Jennings, the world’s best “Jeopardy!” contestant, at a game of information retrieval. Computers can write routine news stories and do routine legal work. Our test-driven schools are training kids for exactly the rote tasks that can be done much more effectively by computers.

The better approach, the film argues, is to take content off center stage and to emphasize the relational skills future workers will actually need: being able to motivate, collaborate, persevere and navigate through a complex buffet of freelance gigs.

Whiteley highlights one school he believes is training students well. This is High Tech High, a celebrated school in San Diego that was started by business and tech leaders. This school takes an old idea, project-based learning, and updates it.

There are no textbooks, no bells marking the end of one period or start of the next. Students are given group projects built around a driving question. One group studied why civilizations rise and fall and then built a giant wooden model, with moving gears and gizmos, to illustrate the students’ theory. Another group studied diseases and made a film.

“Most Likely to Succeed” doesn’t let us see what students think causes civilizational decline, but it devotes a lot of time to how skilled they are at working in teams, demonstrating grit and



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

developing self-confidence. There are some great emotional moments. A shy girl blossoms as a theater director. A smart but struggling boy eventually solves the problem that has stumped him.

The documentary is about relationships, not subject matter. In the school, teachers cover about half as much content as in a regular school. Long stretches of history and other subject curriculums are effectively skipped. Students do not develop conventional study habits.

The big question is whether such a shift from content to life skills is the proper response to a high-tech economy.

Ultimately, what matters is not only how well you can collaborate in groups, but the quality of the mind you bring to the group. In rightly playing up soft skills the movie underemphasizes intellectual virtues. It ignores the distinction between information processing, which computers are good at, and knowledge, which they are not.

If we want to produce wise people, what are the stages that produce it? First, there is basic factual acquisition. You have to know what a neutron or a gene is, that the Civil War came before the Progressive Era. Research shows that students with a concrete level of core knowledge are better at remembering advanced facts and concepts as they go along.

Second, there is pattern formation, linking facts together in meaningful ways. This can be done by a good lecturer, through class discussion, through unconscious processing or by going over and over a challenging text until it clicks.

Third, there is mental reformation. At some point while studying a field, the student realizes she has learned a new language and way of seeing — how to think like a mathematician or a poet.

At this point information has become knowledge. It is alive. It can be manipulated and rearranged. At this point a student has the mental content and architecture to innovate, to come up with new theses, challenge others’ theses and be challenged in turn. After living with this sort of knowledge, wisdom dawns.

David Brooks, The New York Times.

Be heard! Comment online at eastoregonian.com