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KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

JENNINE PERKINSON
Advertising Director

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

OUR VIEW



The future is here. What's next?

Great Scott!

Today, Oct. 21, 2015, is the day Dr. Emmett Brown and Marty McFly touch down in the future depicted by the 1980s film "Back to the Future: Part II."

The pair made the jump in the iconic DeLorean from 1985 and appeared in a world where cars don't need roads, hoverboards are all the rage and the Cubs win the World Series. At least it wasn't completely far-fetched.

The film's writer and director, Robert Zemeckis, was obviously more interested in getting a few chuckles and advancing the plot than accurately predicting the future, and much has been written in the lead-up to this nerdy holiday about what he got right and what he got wrong.

If you haven't seen the film, here's a quick rundown:

- Homes aren't equipped with a fax machine in every room, but people do tend to have their eyes on several screens at all times.

- The "Jaws" franchise didn't quite make it to a 19th iteration, but we do have a strange affinity for 1980s nostalgia.

- Newspapers still exist as a key plot device in peoples' lives, and news images are captured by drones.

Later in the film the duo jumps back to 1985, and it's strange to think that 1985 was the midpoint between then and now. Teens of 1985 — like McFly — have the same distant understanding of 1955 and vague grasp of 2015 that today's youth have of 1985 and 2045.

Doc Brown says in the film he created the time machine "to gain a clear perception of humanity. Where we've been, where we're going, the pitfalls, the possibilities, the perils and promise."

We don't have a flux capacitor and can't actually jump ahead three decades to see what's coming next, but it's a fun exercise to use what we know of the past and look at current trends to make some predictions. Feel free to clip these predictions out, put them in a time capsule, and open it on Oct. 21, 2045.

- Technological advances can be tricky for the layman to see coming — flying cars probably seemed like a lot of fun in the 1980s, but still aren't at all practical. But we do expect a nearly entirely electric fleet

of vehicles on our roads. We know fossil fuel is too costly and limited to rely upon for the long term, and see the innovations of both major car companies and upstarts like Tesla as the next step in transportation.

Along with electric engines, these vehicles will be far better at communicating with one another on the road and detecting danger. Driving will become a more passive experience until eventually your vehicle is a ping on the map, driving itself toward home.

The big question will be how to power these vehicles as coal — our current top energy producer — is phased out in North America. Wind, solar and hydro combined might not make up the difference, but our prediction is nuclear will be brought back online to fill in the gap.

- The family unit will continue to evolve. In trends that date back to the 1950s, fewer women are becoming mothers and those who do are having fewer children. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, more than 40 percent of American babies are now born to unmarried women — but are not unplanned pregnancies. Most are born to women in their 20s and early 30s. Marriage rates in general are at historically low levels — and they are taking divorce rates down with them. It seems clear that in 30 years, marriage will not be the cultural institution it is today, nor the societal norm. A family will look different.

- Daily printed newspapers won't exist. It pains us to say, but the demand for ink and paper is declining too quickly to imagine enough of a resurgence to run a press every day of the week and deliver the product door to door. The daily news will continue its migration to digital formats, and print will become a specialty.

But a specialty isn't entirely a bad thing. Record players have come back into vogue, even though putting an LP on the table and setting the needle into the groove is far less convenient than clicking a couple of buttons and hearing any song in the universe. It's because focused, dedicated attention to a subject will always be highly valued. Newspapers are no longer the best way to distribute information, but they will remain the best way to absorb it on a deep level.

What will the world look like in 30 years?

OTHER VIEWS

Who'd be a journalist?

EUGENE — Jonathan Bach's dream job is in a profession that's widely reviled, poorly compensated and often dangerous. A lot of people tell him it's doomed to become obsolete. None of that seems to matter to him.

He still wants to be a journalist.

This summer Mr. Bach got his first taste of daily newspaper reporting at the *East Oregonian*, a publication based in Pendleton. He covered rodeos, Native American tribes and the opening of a new bar called the Strip'n Chute. He wrote a lot, wrote fast — and earned minimum wage.

"It's the best job in the world," he said, with all the earnestness you'd expect from a 21-year-old college senior.

To enter journalism these days you have to be a true believer. If you can find an entry-level job — and newspaper staffs declined by 10 percent last year — you will more than likely take a vow of poverty worthy of a monk. Even in television, a news reporter can make as little as \$18,000 a year.

In our polarized society, public trust of the media is at an all-time low, according to a recent Gallup poll. Across the political spectrum, some accuse us of spreading insidious liberal ideas, while others call us lackeys of a corporate, right-wing conspiracy. Worse yet, people think of us as heartless jerks who'd make a little boy cry or kick an immigrant in pursuit of a story.

The truth is that the best journalists connect with readers, viewers and listeners by being open-minded and compassionate. That's one reason so many people remain in the profession, despite the poor pay and long hours. As Mr. Bach learned on assignments like interviewing a rodeo camp volunteer, empathy is a key part of the job.

"You get to share stories and you get to see things through someone else's eyes every day," he said.

I tell the young reporters I teach at the University of Oregon to ignore the gloom that surrounds the profession and its future. People will always have an appetite for true stories well told.

And they will never stop wanting essential information, delivered quickly and accurately. When a gunman opened fire on Oct. 1 at a community college in Roseburg, some 70 miles south of Eugene, several news outlets contacted our university's journalism department and asked: Do you know a young freelance reporter or photographer we can hire? Right away?

Cameron Shultz, a graduate student who was hired by national television networks and local stations, took his camera and captured evocative images at an evacuation center and a candlelight vigil.

We've tried to teach our students that even the simplest story requires craft and discipline.

Consider the recent example of Alison Parker, a 24-year-old reporter for a Virginia television station. Like Mr. Bach, she'd started her career as an intern. Her last story was about Smith Mountain Lake, a local landmark.

The video that Ms. Parker's killer posted of her murder reveals that he was pointing a gun at her, within her field of vision, for at least 10 seconds before he opened fire. Ms. Parker was interviewing the head of the local chamber of commerce. She was too focused on doing her job well to realize her life was in danger.

"When you go on television, you lose a bit of yourself," said Rebecca Force, a



HÉCTOR TOBAR
Comment

veteran television news reporter and director who is now a professor at the University of Oregon. When a reporter is on live, as Ms. Parker was, Professor Force said: "You're in the moment. You have little time. You're on. There is no going back and erasing it. You have just one take."

Ms. Parker and her cameraman, Adam Ward, died reporting the sort of everyday, unabashedly local story that is the bread and butter of news operations everywhere. She held the mike steady as her interviewee said, "This is our community and we want to share information that will help us grow and develop ..."

Young journalists operate on a strange mix of adrenaline and idealism. They savor the rush that comes with making a deadline, or conquering the stage fright of a live broadcast. And they believe that if they master those skills, they'll contribute something important to their communities.

"I don't think that one photograph is going to change the world, but it's a record of where we are," the Mexican journalist Rubén Espinosa said in one of his last interviews before he was killed in Mexico City in July. He covered the drama unfolding in the Mexican state of Veracruz: official corruption, violent organized crime, disappearances, protest and resistance.

Mr. Espinosa's work had earned him death threats and the enmity of powerful people in Veracruz. Many American journalists working abroad have faced similar dangers from those who would silence them — including James Foley, a graduate of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.

"He gave his life trying to expose the world to the suffering of the Syrian people," Mr. Foley's mother said, after he was killed by his Islamic State captors in Syria last year.

As a kid growing up in Bend, Ore., Mr. Bach dreamed of being a foreign correspondent. He'd fall asleep listening to BBC radio reports from distant lands. India. Pakistan. Russia.

His goal now is to report from Eastern Europe. In addition to studying journalism, he's in his third year of Russian language classes. And he's already been to Ukraine and Azerbaijan to try his hand at freelance reporting.

"There's nothing like dropping into a country for a week, and reporting a story, and getting it published," he said.

Mr. Bach was also among the University of Oregon students asked to cover the tragedy in Roseburg. For *The Daily Beast*, he interviewed friends of an English teacher who died in the shooting, and a nursing student who suddenly found her class transformed into an emergency room.

I'm confident that Mr. Bach conducted himself professionally on this assignment. And that he remembered what we professors taught him and his fellow students when we sent them to cover stories on campus, at City Hall and at county fairs:

Be respectful to the people you interview. Double-check the spelling of every name. And always make your deadlines.

Héctor Tobar, an assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Oregon, is an author and a contributing writer to the *New York Times*.



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YOUR VIEWS

Gas tax part of a 1-2 punch to local economy

I recently read a comment from a Pendleton City Council member about the proposed utility fee and 5 cent gas tax for the maintaining of neighborhood streets. "The neat thing of it is, it's a one-two punch," he said. Since when is getting punched twice a good thing?

Haven't the people in (and around) Pendleton been beaten enough with so-called temporary gas taxes for questionable projects in the past? I have a vote and a say in the gas tax, but the Pendleton City Council can approve the utility fee without my consent. I would rather the council take this fighting spirit and punch holes in the current budget instead of simply trying to raise more taxes.

Eli Stephens
Pendleton

Nice streets part of every livable town

Thanks to the citizens of Pendleton who voted to improve our schools so families would want to live here. Thanks to the citizens who voted to support Blue Mountain Community College so our children can get affordable college. Thanks to our city government and many service organizations that have helped revive our downtown so that more and more businesses are opening. Many, many visitors comment on what a wonderful and attractive downtown we have with many independent restaurants, artisan shops, and historic attractions.

I hope that in a month I can thank our citizens for supporting a gas tax to fix our incredibly crappy roads. If you are concerned about the cost of the tax, talk to a variety

of folks who aren't simply trying to scare you with rumors about the cost. It is a very small amount of money each month to have our roads fixed.

A yes vote for upgrading our roads is more than just fixing potholes, it's about making Pendleton a city we are proud of and a town in which folks would want to visit, shop, and raise a family.

David Lange
Pendleton

Oil companies behind gas tax attack ads

Do you know that Byrnes Oil Company, whose owner lives in Pilot Rock, donated \$3,000 to the Oregon Fuels Association PAC — a Portland-based political action committee — to influence the outcome of the city of Pendleton

fuel tax election by printing a terribly misinformed mailer intended to confuse the voters of Pendleton? It says: Don't trust em! Vote no!

So, what other big spender out-of-towners want to tell us how to vote? It's really pretty simple: Yes, you get the streets fixed; no, you don't. 'Nuff bum dope. Get the nickels out. Let's do something really big for once: fix the damn streets. Have a nice day.

Larry O'Rourke
Pendleton

Don't raise gas prices in Pendleton, vote no

I like buying all my gas in Pendleton. Low gas prices will bring business back to Pendleton. Let's not go back to the highest priced gas in the county.

Vote no on the fuel tax
November 3.

Rex J. Morehouse
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.