

Quick takes

Brush, trees cut at Hermiston's Riverfront Park

Get rid of the stuff that is needed for fish and wildlife? When the bank erodes and they have to spend thousands of dollars to fix it, bet they will start planting stuff there again.

— Ashley Madsen

Loss of habitat. What were they thinking? it looks awful.

— Debbie Dee

Foster parents provide safe haven for children

The need for quality foster homes is huge. If God is calling you to become a foster parent do it. You will be blessed.

— Marchelle Knapp

The world needs more people willing to step up and fight for these kids and not just for a paycheck.

— Katrina WM

Hermiston High School band conquers Holiday Bowl

This one time at band camp we took first place in everything. Way to go HHS!

— Al Rafferty

Way to go! Winning every category over nine other bands. Be proud, all.

— Donna Betts

Band kiddos rock!

— Peg Jones

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

Beautiful Belinda: Saved in an old file box

Sorting through old files from my storage unit here outside Pendleton, a couple months ago I unearthed a treasure from my terrific year of growing up —1953—at James Madison Junior High School in West Seattle.

Beautiful Belinda is a dramatic reading created and written out quickly, in longhand, on two and a half pages of lined 3-hole paper in 1953 for a young Tom Hebert—then a daily ferry boat commuter from Vashon Island—by a wonderful even transformative teacher at James Madison. Her 9th grade English class, actually Speech Arts, was where we learned the several varieties of public speaking. But the story she wrote mid-term on January 28 was her personal challenge to me.

Of course, she herself played the piano's sound effects called for in the script. The original copy has been saved, as she ordered, for 63 years. I don't remember her name but I have asked the principal to search for her.

Anyway, upon finding it in that battered old file box, as a writer would I put it in my desktop's Slough of Despond —things I have to read and work on, eventually. But, driven by curiosity, the manuscript rose to the top quickly and earlier this week I read it through for the first time since January, 1953.



TOM
HEBERT
Comment

And then I typed it up. From the very first sentence it is clear that the lady was more than a teacher. More, a writer. She remains a legacy teacher, one I will never forget or thank enough.

"Beautiful Belinda"

(Recite dramatically)

It was a beautiful spring day in late October. The little birds were twittering (twitter on piano) in the tree tops. The ocean waves were beating against the rock-bound coast of Indiana (imitate). A storm was on the deep.

High up in the heavens a single radiant star starred (piano strikes one high note). From a casement window in a castle by the sea, a beautiful form gazed out upon the landscape.

The castle was ugly (bass rumble). The storm was ugly (bass rumble).

But the form, ah, the form (piano plays two lines from "Oh, You Great Big Beautiful Doll" and chorus says rapturously "Bee-youtiful Belinda!!!!").

She shuddered (piano keys tremble). And then she heaved a sigh (descending slide across the keys from treble to bass). She was pensive because she was alone. What was she thinking of? (bugle call). Ah, hah! She was thinking of Alphonso, the aviator hero!

But hark! (base cord). A sound of galloping hooves

is heard at the front door. A knock! (knock four times on top of piano). She shudders (tremble on piano). For she knew that Desperate Desmond, the Demon of the Deep was here (base cord). A moment later she heard him batter down the front door (discord all over the piano). She is in breathless apprehension (shrink to left foot for facial expression) was like a terror-stricken doe awaiting the approach of a blood-thirsty lion. Then — then she heard him coming up the stairs. She was trapped! (chord). She shuddered (tremolo). And then she shuddered some more (more tremolo). But she was safe for the present at least. The second door was locked. But hark! (cord). Desperate Desmond calls for his men. And his blood-thirsty crew all ascend the stairs (piano ascends the scale by twos). Gracious heavens! They are breaking down the door (discord). They enter — Desperate Desmond and his Demon Crew (piano: "Hail, Hail, the gang's all here!").

Beautiful Belinda is in their power! But without, the little birds still twittered in the tree-tops (twitter) and the storm was on the deep (rumble) and the single star but not as high as before, still starred. She was alone, but assistance is at hand (bugle call). Handsome Harry Alphonso, the American aviator flies in, just in the nick of time. He seizes Bee-youtiful Belinda with one hand, dashes Desperate Desmond and his Demon Crew

to the earth with the other, starts his motor with one foot, shoots the villain with the other, and they are saved! (chord). Out, and away they fly to life and liberty and wedding bells (Wedding March).

And without the little birds still twittering in the treetops (twitter). They twittered and twittered and twittered until there wasn't a twitter left in them (twitter dies away).

The ocean wave still beats upon the rock-bound coast of Indiana (rumble) and high up in the heavens the single star still stars! (same high note).

Of course, I just read it again out loud, and just like the kid I was in 1953, laughed and laughed.

With the confidence gained in that junior high class room, this Island immigrant to Seattle ended 1953 at James Madison as master of ceremonies for the school's Annual Springtime Talent Show and went on to a bachelor degree in Speech and Theatre Arts at Linfield College and graduate school at the Dallas Theater Center and Baylor University. And later taught Public Speaking at Prairie View A&M University. And, as friends will attest, has been telling stories ever since.

Today, Tom Hebert is a writer and public policy consultant living on the Umatilla Indian Reservation outside Pendleton.



Buyouts of grazing allotments win important support

By TOM RIBE

Writers on the Range

Idaho's White Cloud Mountains seem like an unlikely place for the beginning of a positive shift in public-land management. They gleam high and cold above the seemingly endless sagebrush plains of southern Idaho, one of the most conservative states in the West. Yet it was here last year that Republicans worked with environmentalists to plant a legislative seed that may help reverse a century of decline for native plants and wildlife all over the West.

Summers last only a few weeks in the White Cloud Mountains, and with off-road vehicles and mining closing in on these once-remote expanses, environmentalists have campaigned since the 1970s for wilderness protection. Recently, frustration with congressional inaction led to a push for a 600,000-acre national monument, which President Obama seemed ready to endorse. Then the Republican Idaho congressional delegation agreed to compromise on a 275,000-acre wilderness bill that passed last August.

Wilderness bills, though rare these days, sometimes include unfortunate concessions. But the Boulder White Clouds wilderness bill included a provision that both ranchers and environmentalists supported, and it's one that may help shift public-land grazing throughout the West. It allows ranchers to voluntarily sell or donate their federal grazing leases back to the Forest Service on 700,000 acres surrounding the newly designated wilderness. In turn, the Forest Service will permanently close the affected grazing allotments. In large part, ranchers agreed to relinquish these allotments after years of predator-cattle conflicts within the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

Though other localized buyout programs have passed Congress since 1998, ranchers have defeated national buyout legislation because of the precedent-setting nature of ending grazing allotments, and because some ranchers consider federal grazing areas their private property. The Boulder White Clouds bill reveals that an aging population of ranchers, struggling to make ends meet in a drought-affected, urbanizing West, may be ready to ride off into the sunset.

According to BeefResearch.org, 65 percent of ranchers are over age 55 and only 12 percent are under 45 years old. As the majority of ranchers reach retirement age, most don't have children willing to do the

hard work and earn the low pay that comes with ranching in the arid West. Buyouts offer ranching families a chance to end their ranching careers with a decent income.

Farther south, in New Mexico's Gila Mountains, nonprofit organizations have been working for years to develop a grazing allotment buyout plan to restore overgrazed Forest Service land and reduce cattle-Mexican wolf conflicts. Many ranchers say they are ready to take privately funded buyouts on a half-million acres of public land, but the Forest Service is making things difficult: It is blocking the buyouts because having fewer cattle allotments to manage means budget cuts for the agency.

The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management spent about \$128 million in 2013 administering their grazing programs while receiving only \$12 million in receipts from ranchers, a small fraction of which goes back to the agencies. These direct costs to taxpayers stand beside incalculable indirect costs, such as watershed damage, and the spread of flammable cheatgrass where cattle have trampled biotic crusts. There's also the impact of grazing on hundreds of millions of acres of sage grouse habitat and recreation areas in high-altitude wilderness areas.

Since 2011, a bill to permit permanent federal grazing allotment buyouts has languished in Congress. Called the Rural Economic Vitalization Act, it would authorize buyouts on any federal lands and would be a critical tool for agencies facing endangered species conflicts, such as the BLM with sage grouse, or the Forest Service with bison, wolves and 170 other species. If passed, the bill would allow conservation groups, ranchers and agency managers to end grazing on key areas in a way that promises both dignity for the rancher and restoration for the land.

This market-based solution should appeal to conservative politicians as well as to many ranchers of retirement age.

By endorsing grazing buyouts in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, Idaho's congressional delegation has given the national buyout campaign the biggest bipartisan push it has received to date. Idaho especially stands to gain if agencies can relieve grazing pressure on sage grouse habitat. Ending grazing with buyouts will finally begin the long process of native plant restoration over hundreds of millions of acres of public land.

Tom Ribe, Writers on the Range.

Privilege, pathology and power

Wealth can be bad for your soul. That's not just a hoary piece of folk wisdom; it's a conclusion from serious social science, confirmed by statistical analysis and experiment. The affluent are, on average, less likely to exhibit empathy, less likely to respect norms and even laws, more likely to cheat, than those occupying lower rungs on the economic ladder.

And it's obvious, even if we don't have statistical confirmation, that extreme wealth can do extreme spiritual damage. Take someone whose personality might have been merely disagreeable under normal circumstances, and give him the kind of wealth that lets him surround himself with sycophants and usually get whatever he wants. It's not hard to see how he could become almost pathologically self-regarding and unconcerned with others.

Modern America is a society in which a growing share of income and wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small number of people, and these people have huge political influence — in the early stages of the 2016 presidential campaign, around half the contributions came from fewer than 200 wealthy families. The usual concern about this march toward oligarchy is that the interests and policy preferences of the very rich are quite different from those of the population at large, and that is surely the biggest problem.

But it's also true that those empowered by money-driven politics include a disproportionate number of spoiled egomaniacs. Which brings me to the current election cycle.

The most obvious illustration of the point I've been making is the man now leading the Republican field. Donald Trump would probably have been a blowhard and a bully whatever his social station. But his billions have insulated him from the external checks that limit most people's ability to act out their narcissistic tendencies; nobody has ever been in a position to tell him, "You're fired!" The result is the face you keep seeing on your TV.

But Trump isn't the only awesomely self-centered billionaire playing an outsized role in the 2016 campaign.

There have been some interesting news reports lately about Sheldon Adelson, the Las Vegas gambling magnate. Adelson has been involved in some fairly complex court proceedings, which revolve around claims of misconduct in his operations in Macau,

including links to organized crime and prostitution. Given his business, this may not be all that surprising. What was surprising was his behavior in court, where he refused to answer routine questions and argued with the judge, Elizabeth Gonzales. That, as she rightly pointed out, isn't something witnesses get to do.

Then Adelson bought Nevada's largest newspaper. As the sale was being finalized, reporters at

the paper were told to drop everything and start monitoring all activity of three judges, including Gonzales. And while the paper never published any results from that investigation, an attack on Gonzales, with what looks like a fictitious byline, did appear in a small Connecticut newspaper owned by one of Adelson's associates.

OK, but why do we care? Because Adelson's political spending has made him a huge player in Republican politics — so much so that reporters routinely talk about the "Adelson primary," in which candidates trek to Las Vegas to pay obeisance.

Are there other cases? Yes indeed, even if the egomania doesn't rise to Adelson levels. I find myself thinking, for example, of hedge-fund billionaire Paul Singer, another big power in the GOP, who published an investor's letter declaring that inflation was running rampant — he could tell from the prices of Hamptons real estate and high-end art. Economists got some laughs out of the incident, but think of the self-absorption required to write something like that without realizing how it would sound to non-billionaires.

Just to be clear, the biggest reason to oppose the power of money in politics is the way it lets the wealthy rig the system and distort policy priorities. And the biggest reason billionaires hate Obama is what he did to their taxes, not their feelings. The fact that some of those buying influence are also horrible people is secondary.

But it's not trivial. Oligarchy, rule by the few, also tends to become rule by the monstrously self-centered. Narcissocracy? Jerkigarchy? Anyway, it's an ugly spectacle, and it's probably going to get even uglier over the course of the year ahead.

Paul Krugman joined The New York Times in 1999 as a columnist on the Op-Ed Page and continues as professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University.