

# The power in every student's voice

How can words lead to change? When I wrote the question on the board, and saw the six words stretch out to my right as my hand held the pen, I stopped and stared. Six individual words, and yet so much more than six simple words at the same time.

I looked at the 27 pairs of eyes watching me, waiting for my next move, and I realized that the question I had chosen to give me strength as I maneuvered through the year was not going to disappear and then reappear, depending on where I was or who I was with.

The word voice was coming to life (for more than just me) right under the date in my very own classroom with the beautiful souls that fill the desks and spaces of my heart each weekday from August to June.

The question hung in the air like twine dangling from a gate as we said it together. "How can words lead to change?" We repeated them and heard ourselves speaking words in a normal Monday morning sort of way, but at the same time, we heard what the

words were asking.

It was a phrase, a question, full of a quiet kind of strength — so useful when used in the right way, but lifeless without someone — the right one — to bend and twist and pull at it, shaping it into something strong and beautiful with purpose and poise.

Our words are like strands of twine. They are strong when they're together, but alone, they can be weak.

And when we're smart enough to loop one end through another and pull

tight, we realize that what we've done, what we've said, and even what we've made is one of the most powerful things one could ever hope to hold in their hands, let alone be a part of creating.

I stood in front of my class and reminded them how powerful voice can be. I remember saying to them: "Your voice is a tool that can change everything in an instant — as you scribble across a paper, or open your heart while reading something meaningful, or even — perhaps — when you whisper and the words you're thinking and

feeling barely slip off your tongue."

After a short but real discussion about those six words, we, as a class, read a story of a woman that had spent a good portion of her life using her voice on paper and in public gatherings in powerful and purposeful ways. A story about a woman that never saw the actual outcome of the strength her voice truly held.

I don't know for sure, but I'm fairly certain that she knew that what she was doing was changing things, but the actual, physical change didn't come until she was gone. She had weaved her way through several spaces and places, using grace and dignity to stand up for what she knew was right. She was opposed, and fought against, but she never gave up. She held strong under pressure and was used in just the right ways — similar to the several pieces of twine dangling from gates, and bales of hay in my own life.

I may never know how my words might change the world around me — in my home, at the drive-up window, in the quiet of my car, in my classrooms, in my church, in my neighborhood, in board meetings or even in my own journal that no one may ever read but me.

But I can promise you this: I will daily remind myself, my own children, and the children entrusted in my care each school year, that we should never cease using our voice in the biggest and best of ways in doubt that it is making a difference.

Our words — our voices — are like



Photo courtesy Lindsay Murdock



## LINDSAY MURDOCK FROM SUN UP TO SUN DOWN

pieces of twine — hanging on a gate, just waiting to be used to become something stronger when they're tied together. Count on it.

Lindsay Murdock lives in Echo and teaches in the Hermiston School District.

# The mystery of 'Monk' Fessler

By RON LINN

I don't know why he was called "Monk" Fessler. That's what we kids, in the neighborhood, knew him by. All the adults called him Monk Fessler. Maybe it was just the times. Nicknames were used more than they are now. I bet there is a story behind the name "Monk," but I don't know it.

His real name was Frank Fessler, and we kids in the neighborhood of Silverton where I grew up were afraid of him. He was "different," and different people scare kids, so we were scared of him. I never heard of him doing anything dangerous to anybody and, looking back, I just don't know who Frank Fessler really was.

He must have been in his early forties or so when I first knew of him. "They" said he was a prize fighter in his youth, known for his ability to take a punch. That's what "they" said the problem was: "punch drunk." Took too many punches while a boxer and got his brain scrambled. Monk was known for his physical strength and stamina and many tales were told about his exploits.

A local town had an annual hop festival weekend, which included a walking race from some point to another; quite a distance. It was said that Monk would enter in this walk race every year and, at about mile eight, he would think about the beer waiting as a reward at the end of the race and break into a run. This of course got him disqualified. People marveled that at mile eight he would have that kind of energy, to break into a run. This was before people ran for fitness and recreation so distance running was only done by training/trained athletes. That he would be foolish enough to run, and therefore be disqualified, amazed people.

It was understood that he liked beer, and a free beer was the reward at the finish line.

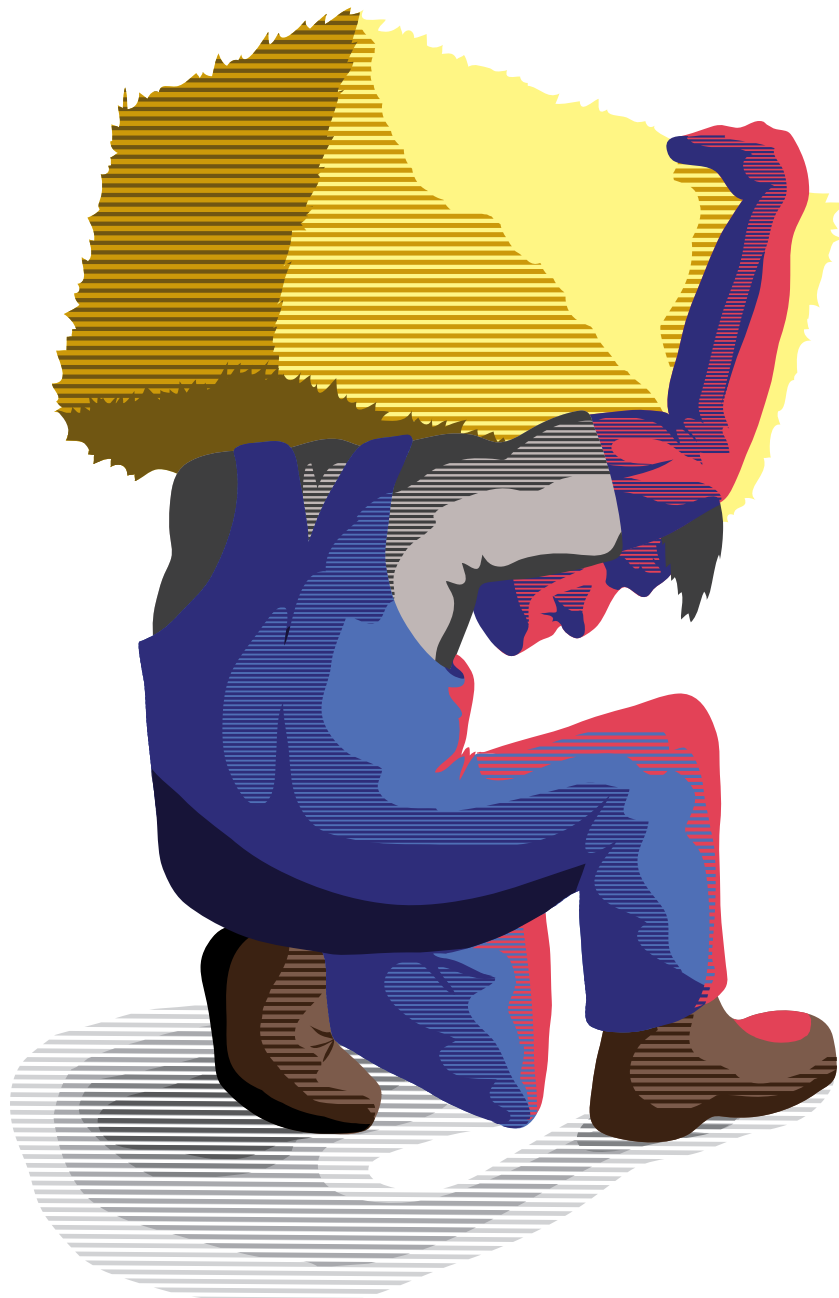
Frank lived with his mother on a small acreage among hop yards, and always rode a bicycle for transportation. He didn't just ride that bike; he attacked the bike with head-down, pedal pumping vigor. It was a standard single speed, coaster brake bike, in a light green color. I don't know that he ever drove a car.

Prominent in the town where I went to grade school was a John Deere tractor dealership. Every year they would have an open house, which my grade school took advantage of for a field trip. We would all be marched down the hill to the dealership, each classroom shepherded by its teacher. This was a holiday for us, filled with John Deere tractor movies, displays of farm machinery, and free pop and hot dogs. All you could eat!

Of course the whole farm community would be there. Men, standing around in bib overalls or blue jeans, looking at the newest farm equipment and talking over the merits of each. Frank would be there also, with his simple face, standing with the groups of men, wanting to belong.

This was, by any measure, a carnival atmosphere but that does not excuse what I saw happen that day.

The men challenged Frank to pick the front end of a small John Deere Tractor off the floor. Frank approached the tractor and experimented with the grip. Trying this way,



and that, Frank struggled amid the clamor from the pack of men circling him. I admit the challenge was interesting and his effort was remarkable. He got one front wheel off the floor and the tractor skidded sideways. No doubt: He was very strong. It was the way they went about it, that group of men, taking advantage of the simple man. Egging him on. Even at 7 or 8 years old I knew there was something wrong with the way they were treating him. Surrounding him like a pack of jackals, not making fun with him, but of him.

It wasn't right. Frank had a way of nodding his head in the affirmative, a really quick head nod, almost like a nervous tic. I think it was a reaction to his extreme need to please people. They promised him a free hot dog if he could lift the tractor. What? The hot dogs were free anyway!

On Sundays, after church, my dad would stop the car, full of us Linns, at the little market across from that tractor dealership to pick up the week's supply of meat from the cold storage locker we rented in the market.

On this particular Sunday our 1949 sea mist green Ford sedan was parked in front of the market. As we returned to the car, there was Frank Fessler, straddling his green bike. Mom and we four kids ducked into the car, on the opposite side, like rabbits into the safety of the burrow. Dad, however, stopped where Frank was and started visiting with him. I furtively watched my dad standing there, in white shirt and tie, suit pants and suspenders. His manner was calm, his face and hands engaged in conversation with Frank Fessler. Frank stood straddling his bike with his positive nodding twitch. We were all nervous. Frank was "different."

The conversation ended and dad took his place in the driver's seat. Mom asked "What was that all about?" once we got underway.

Dad replied, "He said, we were just alike, his bike was green and so was our car."

In my early teen years three of us guys formed a hay hauling enterprise. We had an 8N Ford tractor and two four-wheel trailers we hooked in tandem. With vigor, we would load the bales in the field and stack them wherever you wanted them.

We got a call one day from a dairy on Barlow Road. They needed hay hauled and stacked.

When we arrived on the job site at the appointed day we found we would be working with Frank Fessler. This kind of spooked us. Frank was "different." He was also known to be very strong and worked like a crazy man. We thought we were pretty good workers and felt we had a challenge before us.

Dean drove tractor and Gerald, Frank and I carried bales to the trailer from the rows of bales. Soon Gerald went up on the trailer and stacked bales that we threw up to him. Then he had to stretch over the side with a hay hook to catch the bales that formed the last few top layers.

So the morning went on, bale after bale, trailer after trailer, load after load.

We were watching Frank for a burst of superhuman work that justified his reputation. What we saw was a cheerful worker who held his end and fit right in with us boys.

The early morning started to lean toward noon, and the sun bore down. Frank began to fade. The trailer had to wait for him some times and he couldn't get the top bales up to Gerald very well. Gerald almost came off the load trying to hook the bale as high as Frank could get it.

We watched. We could see it embarrassed him. The legend was running out of gas and proving to be just like us. I started taking all the outside rows and as much of the top row bales as I could do. Dean dropped a gear in the Ford. Frank was now just a middle-aged guy on our team.

Some of the farms we worked for still held with the tradition of feeding dinner to the help at noon. Snyder was one such outfit. Mary Snyder set an outdoor feast before us on the lawn under the trees: fried chicken, potato salad, baked beans, bread and butter and ice cold lemonade.

Frank revived.

He tore into the chicken with huge piles of potato salad floating like islands in the baked beans. Between bites he explained to Mr. Snyder how we boys just about killed him out in the field. He bragged on how good we were at loading and unloading those wagons of hay. There was good-natured kidding all around the table. We passed a comfortable and fun hour talking of the work and the simple events of the morning. I decided right then I wanted to be like my father, and like Mary Snyder. Not like that pack of jackals in town. Whoever, or whomever Frank was, he deserved better than that.

We spent the hot afternoon putting up hay for that farm, with Frank Fessler as a member of our team, and he didn't scare us anymore. We busted ass to make it workable for him and, to hear how he told it, we were heroes and supermen.

If you live a million days, pray you learn a million things.

Ron Linn lives in Stanfield where he was an agricultural pilot for nearly 40 years.

# The right to work in Oregon

The Bend Bulletin

When is Oregon government going to make jobs a priority?

The Legislature seems intent on making it harder to create and keep jobs. It's looking at meddling in scheduling for businesses. It's looking at new taxes on businesses. And in Senate Bill 1040, it's looking at ensuring that before an Oregonian can get a job he or she could be compelled to join a union or at least pay dues to support it.

SB 1040's chief sponsors are Sens. Ginny Burdick of Portland, Arnie Roblan of Coos Bay and James Manning of Eugene and Reps. Jennifer Williamson of Portland, John Lively of Springfield and Dan Rayfield of Corvallis. They are all Democrats.

The bill is about so-called right-to-work laws. Unions hate them. That's because right-to-work laws remove mandatory union membership dues as a condition of getting a job.

Oregon is not a right-to-work state. In Oregon a private employer can have an agreement — called a union security agreement — that union membership is essentially compulsory. If an employee doesn't want to join the union, they can still get a job, but the employee has to pay dues to the union.

That compulsory support for unions is problematic, at the very least. It is easily a violation of free speech. Is it right to force people to pay to support a union when their political views may not agree? No. Most states have banned union security agreements as a tool to attract and retain businesses. Not Oregon.

SB 1040 fits into this debate by prohibiting any local government in Oregon from banning union security agreements.

Why do that? Why not allow a local community to decide what's right for itself rather than legislators dictating one policy for the entire state? What problem does this bill solve other than providing a way for some legislators to cozy up to unions?

Oregon has every reason to try to make itself more attractive to employers and not invent new ways to be less attractive. Unfortunately, the state's Democratic leaders would like to go in the opposite direction.

## Quick takes

### Student with permit brought gun to BMCC campus

Not only is it perfectly legal for him to carry, but given that I am not old enough to get my own concealed carry license I feel safer while attending BMCC Hermiston knowing that there are good guys that are armed.

— Paden LaCoursiere

Even being a public school, it's still private property and you have no right to carry on some one else's property if they decide to not allow it. The Constitution only protects you from the government, not the land owner.

— Serafina Schuening

People that have a CHL are permitted to carry on public property with very few exceptions. Schools are not one of the exceptions, no matter what the signs say.

— Mike Navratil

Everybody wants to stop gun violence, but instead we will persecute law-abiding citizens, it is easier to do.

— Jouche Hoelt

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.