

# Spring returns to the diamond

My wife and I have had a now nearly three-decade-long friendly difference of opinion regarding what time of year is our personal favorite. She is a fan of the fall. She particularly likes the leaves brilliantly changing color and falling unceremoniously back to Earth to their final resting place.

She also welcomes the coming of the holidays and especially Thanksgiving, when she demonstrates her hospitality and superior culinary skills to friends and family. She tells me every year that when the days grow shorter and the nights colder, she looks forward to the shift in activity which means more time in the comfortable environs of home and the opportunity to do more reading (and less yard work).

As I may have stated previously, I am a fan of spring. I look forward to warmer temperatures and, in particular, longer days. More daylight means longer hours of productive effort at work (though I'm perpetually two or three jobs behind). I revel in the rapid changes in vegetation, the reappearance of robins and meadowlarks, the first appearance of deer fawns and the beginning of my real favorite season — baseball.

When I was a kid growing up in Echo, I was influenced by many people who fostered and encouraged my interest in our national pastime. I had an aunt who frequently contributed to my (now extensive) library of baseball books. Roger Kahn's great narrative of the post-war Brooklyn Dodgers, "The

Boys of Summer," introduced me to Roy Campanella, Gill Hodges, Jackie Robinson, Duke Snyder and all the rest. My next-door neighbor's phone number is one of the easiest I've ever had to memorize because it combines the only year the Brooklyn Dodgers won the World Series (1955) with the year of my birth, 1969 (the year of "one small step for a man ..." and the Miracle Mets).

My first Little League coach showed me just how much plain fun baseball could be and, perhaps without him even knowing it, I have emulated his habit of driving tractor and listening to baseball on the radio for 30 years. I also followed his example in coaching Little League for many years but could never equal his talent for shouting instructions to rambunctious kids while still chewing on a cigar stub.

My brother and I constructed and sort of maintained a ballpark in my dad's pasture. We used pallets that were fastened together with baling twine and haywire for an outfield fence and employed a Bull Durham tobacco ad-painted barn as our pseudo-grandstand in center field. We never had to worry about repeating Mickey Mantle's mishap with a hidden sprinkler but, because it was a barnyard, there were many obstacles of an "organic" nature left by the full-time bovine inhabitants.

Over the years, I have had the good fortune to experience several lifetimes' worth of baseball-related memories. In 1993, Cindy and I traveled to Chicago to watch the Cubs

and Cardinals play at Wrigley Field in Ozzie Smith's last couple weeks as one of the greatest shortstops of all time. On the way to Chicago, we stopped in Dyersville, Iowa, to visit the National Farm Toy Museum and, by the way, took batting practice on THE Field of Dreams with a nice guy named Steve from Michigan.

A couple of years later, we went to Seattle to watch the Mariners play the Dodgers. After the game, I spied Vin Scully walking away from the ballpark and luckily, was able to bail out the side door of my friends' van in time to have him autograph the only available scrap of paper we possessed—a grocery list. It now reads "milk, cheese, crackers ... Vin Scully."

In 1999, a friend and I made perhaps the baseball trip of our lifetime. My landlady at the time lived in Weston, Massachusetts, and was a fellow baseball aficionado and lifelong Red Sox fan.

She procured two tickets to the All-Star Game at Fenway Park and allowed Mike and I to use her car and bunk in her spare room. I still can't believe that we actually saw the All-Century Team (Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, Warren Spahn, Sandy Koufax, etc.) and witnessed Ted Williams throw out the first pitch and cheered as Pedro Martinez made the National League's best hitters look like overpowered kids (remember Carl Hubbell in the 1934 All-Star Game?), all in the same day. I will never forget the tremendous ovation for the Long Island potato farmer's son, Carl Yastrzemski. Has anyone ever been as good at anything for two weeks as he was at the end of the 1967 Impossible Dream season?

I always look forward to the baseball season beginning and enjoy reminiscing with my similarly addicted friends about Ron



**MATT WOOD**  
FROM THE TRACTOR

Santo, Ken Hubbs, and the recently ended 108-year drought of the Cubs. Those who know me best and have seen my challenges with punctuality and scheduling are well aware of another aspect that attracts me to the game — the absence of a clock. As Yogi Berra liked to say—"It ain't over 'til it's over," and according to George Carlin, we might even have extra innings.

*Matt Wood is his son's hired man and his daughter's biggest fan. He lives on a farm near Helix, where he collects antiques and friends.*

## I have emulated the habit of driving tractor and listening to baseball on the radio for 30 years.



**TOM HEBERT**  
Comment

## The fun and absurdity of growing old

When you go shopping a good rule is to beat the traffic by always parking your car away from the others in a safer space. Because up closer to the front door, other drivers are backing out about to crunch into you and shopping carts are left everywhere.

So, the other day at Walmart I carefully scanned the parking situation and then pulled into a space maybe 75 feet from the nearest car. When I got out, my wheels were astride the yellow lines. Huh? How silly was that? So, right then and there I started laughing at myself.

The next day I needed to tighten a bolt on the bed of my pickup. So, into the tool shed to pick up my good old channel-lock pliers and head back to the truck. But on the way I dropped them in a mud puddle. Darn. As I picked them up, I said, "Sorry guys."

Huh? Did I just apologize to my pliers? Right then and there, between rain showers, I had another good laugh. Somehow, it felt good.

You see, I'm a loyal critter. If someone or something serves me well and without complaint, we are friends. And friends laugh together.

But the funniest laugh happened while I was drafting this column.

You see, I was preparing to have dinner with my BFF (Best Friend Forever), Marie Callender. So, I tucked her into the microwave for four minutes and watched the rain fall. When the ping sounded, I took her out and gave her a taste. Oops. Not enough time. Darn. So back in she goes for another minute.

But Marie and the bowl were so hot at the ping that when I lifted her out I spilled some flat pasta on the floor. Which couldn't go to waste, so I squatted down to pick it up and ate it (no 5-second rule in this house). But just then my Spotify music streaming service started playing Frank Sinatra's old standard, "I'll Do It My Way!" It was way too much. I'm still laughing at myself while I type.

Anyway, I started keeping a list of ridiculous and laughable mistakes, mishaps, lapses in judgment with a total of ten times in a couple days.

So, given that I'm both persnickety with faults you could throw a cat through, the list grew rapidly: Trying to make my usual perfect PB&J sandwich and spilling the jelly on my big toe. Then while trying on vests

to decide on the best one to wear to town I started putting on a vest before I took the other one off. How damn silly and laughable.

So, believing I was on to something valuable about living a good life, I merrily Googled away and within

a nanosecond: "Top 25 Quotes About Laughing At Yourself." Yes! I'm not alone anymore. Other people are doing the same thing. I bet it's a part of real sanity.

Listen to Elizabeth Taylor: "If you can't laugh at yourself, you're cooked!"

On the other side of life was Martin Niemoller, the German anti-Nazi theologian and Lutheran pastor: "If you can laugh at yourself, you are going to be fine. If you allow others to laugh with you, you will be great."

Or this from Jill Abramson, the former executive editor of *The New York Times*: "A general truth is to have a good sense of humor. Roll with the punches of life's ups and downs. Laughing at yourself always helps."

Groucho Marx: "If you find it hard to laugh at yourself, I would be happy to do it for you."

Actor Alan Alda: "Laugh at yourself, but don't doubt yourself."

The gossip columnist, TV star, and above all a giver of great parties, Elsa Maxwell: "Laugh at yourself first, before anyone else can."

Ivanta Yanzanast, inspirational speaker, lawyer, author, and television personality: "Transformation doesn't have to be deep, dark and mysterious. If you screw up, fine — laugh at yourself, learn and move on."

Nirmala Srivastava was the founder of Sahaja Yoga, a meditation technique: "If you know how to laugh at yourself then you will not object or will not stand in the way of any creativity of another person."

The comedian Joan Rivers: "When you can laugh at yourself no one can ever make a fool of you."

Benjamin Franklin: "If you would not be laughed at, be the first to laugh at yourself."

And so, you will grow older with a smile on your face.

Your heart and arteries will be thankful — also your family and friends. Even your old dog or horse.

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*Tom Hebert is a writer and public policy consultant living on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.*

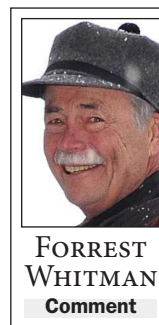
## The West's iconic trains head for the sunset

If you see a train, better get on it. The California Zephyr, the Coast Starlight, the Empire Builder, the Texas Eagle and my favorite, the Southwest Chief, may soon be heading West for one last ride. Back in my railroad days, when a brakeman died, someone would announce at sign-in: "He caught the last westbound."

Of course, it's all about money. The budget President Donald Trump submitted to Congress looks like it was written by the Heritage Foundation, a group that thinks the government has no business "subsidizing" anything, except for the military. Amtrak may cover 94 percent of its budget almost entirely from ticket sales, but still, that's not enough for those purists.

What a loss to the West these iconic trains will be. They are not only part of our Western history, but they are also symbols that somebody still cares about the rural West. Trains say you can still get out of town even when a blizzard is moving in. Trains say to the handicapped person that she can have mobility. Trains say to a senior that he doesn't have to beg a ride from family or a friend but can get down to the station and make his own way. It's the train that stops downtown that says to a little Western community: "You have value beyond what any Harvard Business School teacher would assign."

It would be tragic to see the brand-new Union Station in Denver bereft of long-distance



**FORREST WHITMAN**  
Comment

## Funding ironies abound.

Many people in these small towns voted for the Trump campaign, believing Trump's promise that a trillion dollars would be poured into infrastructure. Now, those trillion dollars have evaporated.

It was money from what was called a "TIGER grant" that helped save the Southwest Chief. All the small towns along its way chipped in hard-earned cash to keep that train going. The grant was matched by funds from three states — Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico — and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad. There are no more TIGER grants in the new budget.

Some of the cuts in the transportation budget seem particularly nonsensical. Elaine Chao, our new Secretary of Transportation, is cutting the California high-speed rail initiative. That kills 9,600 good jobs. Maybe California can do the project anyway, but the federal contribution was a part of the plan. What an irony that this is coming from a "job-creating" administration.

passenger service after all these years. But that loss would also be true of small towns whose names not everyone recognizes. Places like Raton, New Mexico; Libby, Montana; Lamy, New Mexico; Trinidad, Colorado; Cleburne, Texas; Ephrata, Washington; and Winnemucca, Nevada, are not likely to appear in the Sunday *New York Times* travel section. Still, they depend on the Chief or the Eagle, the Empire Builder, the Zephyr or the Coast Starlight.

## Why vote for the fire station bond

On May 16, Pendleton voters will be asked support a bond to build a new fire station. Hopefully, they will ask themselves "What's in it for me?" before marking their ballots.

Rapid and effective emergency response is the foundation for public safety. Sixty years ago, the citizens of Pendleton decided that the antiquated and tiny fire station located behind the old city hall no longer met the city's basic needs.

They stepped up and built Fire Station #1 on Southwest Court Avenue. This new facility was designed to house the typical crews and equipment of a 1950s-era fire station.

Six decades later, Fire Station #1 has passed the end of its useful service life. Like its predecessor, it is now too small to house modern equipment and inadequate for housing women fire fighters and volunteers.

It no longer makes sense to keep pouring maintenance funds of about \$40,000 a year into a facility that is not healthy for its occupants. Its HVAC systems are worn out, it has mold, the roof leaks, engine fumes can't be exhausted, and its electrical systems are unsuited for the



**JOHN TURNER**  
Comment

information age. Because of the physical limits of its location, just renovating the current building won't solve its problem of negotiating the traffic at 10th and Court.

By choosing to build a new fire station on the site of the old St. Anthony Hospital, voters will give themselves faster average response times to 911 calls.

The St. Anthony site will allow a faster response than any other location, including the PGG building or the old movie theater lot. Citizens won't have to wonder if the fire engines and ambulances are trapped behind traffic jams when trying to exit the station.

Voters will provide better training for their fire fighters because there is room to train at the new site. They will know that paramedics will have the necessary equipment, like heart monitors and the Jaws of Life, when they respond to medical emergencies.

When seconds count, a yes vote just might save a life.

So please ask yourself "What's in it for me?" and vote yes for a new fire station.

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*John Turner is mayor of the city of Pendleton.*

The economic arguments for cutting our Western trains make no sense. The budget cutters will spare "money-making" Amtrak trains on the Northeast Corridor. But of the 31 million Amtrak riders last year, 19 million never set foot in the Northeast. Those people rode our Western trains, and in addition, these long-distance trains funnel passengers to the Northeast. The sad fact is that this new budget leaves 144.6 million Americans with no train.

More funding ironies abound. Since 1947, \$600 billion has been poured into our highways over and above what the gas tax brings in. (\$141 billion has been added since 2008.) When conservative lawmakers fume over "subsidies" to Amtrak, they ignore the gusher of money flowing into highways. Of course, we do need to support all our transportation modes, but to single out trains as "money losers" is silly.

I was standing on the platform in Raton, New Mexico, when a young couple rode up on their bikes. One of them said, "We'll catch that train this summer, for sure." I hope they can. The Chief was rolling in so we didn't have time to chat, but I hope to finish our talk in the observation car this summer.

Losing our trains cuts the heart out of the West. I hope we'll call, write letters and let Congress know what it means to us if our Western trains are forced to catch the last westbound.

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*Forrest Whitman is a contributor to Writers on the Range, the opinion service of High Country News. He lives in Salida, Colorado, and rides a lot of trains.*

## Quick takes

### 'Imminent risk' gun bill

Problem is ... who determines who is or isn't a threat? People beware, think about it.  
— **Cathy Borden Morasch**

Here is another thought. What if the person they think is in imminent danger does not want people to take their guns away? Then what? SWAT team?  
— **Chris Sykes**

### State considers tax changes

There is no such thing as a new sales tax on businesses. If you don't think prices will go up to compensate for the lost dollars you're nuts.  
— **Debbie Straight**

Sure would be nice if they cut/controlled spending instead of spending other people's money and then demanding more when they run out.  
— **Valerie Calley**

### Cinco de Mayo in Hermiston

I always looked forward to Cinco de Mayo in school in Hermiston, always fun art and yummy food and wonderful dances.  
— **Ginny Heard**

Looks like I'll be putting on my dancing shoes!  
— **Bri Nichols**

■  
*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.*