

At the zoo with a Lama

When my daughter was eight years old, she and I left an Idaho January and bunked for a couple of weeks on the sixteenth floor of an apartment building on the Waikiki strip. We were house sitting while her mother investigated a rumor that a tiny bird was gagging into extinction on fumes generated by the mountaintop observatories on the Big Island.

On the second Sunday morning of our stay, my daughter Delta suggested that she and I and her new pal Max go to the Honolulu zoo. When she phoned to invite Max, his father asked to speak with me. He explained that he offered his home as a halfway house for Tibetans, and asked if a newly arrived monk could accompany us to the zoo. You bet.

We herded a rental Chevrolet through a catacomb of streets with only vowels in their names until we stumbled across Max's house. Waiting on the steps were bright-eyed Max and a featherweight guy wrapped in golden yellow robes, sporting black high-top Keds and a chrome Timex.

On the way to the zoo, Max explained that he didn't know the monk's name, that the monk didn't speak English, that he slept sitting up and smoked too many cigarettes. Max was a local, so the kids ditched us at the entrance to the zoo. We made quite the pair, a have-a-nice-day-face wrapped in yellow curtains and an over-heated

drugstore cowboy in lace-up logger boots. We had a lot to talk about, but couldn't. We both had a nicotine monkey on our backs, though, so we wandered down the zoo paths, smoking Camel stubbies, pointing at animals and giggling at each other's name for various critters. The Tibetan word for giraffe sounds like "chewing gum."

As we shuffled past the cat cages, the monk was looking back over his shoulder at a yawning lion and giggling. When he turned around he came eye-to-eye with a drippy-eyed Bengal tiger. The little dude came as close to freaking as a Buddhist ever would.

He immediately went into a crouched self-defense posture and from down in that pile of saffron came a throbbing yowl that could have curdled yak milk. It took me awhile to realize that this fellow grew up where tigers run free range and he didn't much care for them. I stepped in front of the cage and broke the spell. He looked at me, looked at the tiger, nodded his head then fired up the smile again.

On the monkey islands a middle-aged chimpanzee was playing games with the humans, throwing a knotted burlap sack over the moat to the crowd. When it was tossed back to him/her, the chimp tucked it behind a chunk of driftwood, performed a somersault routine, then reached behind the log, and threw the cloth ball back into the audience.

During the third repetition of this performance, when a herd of tourists were packed around the ditch popping flashbulbs, the monk grabbed me by the arm and pulled me up on a knoll, away from the show.

He looked me in the eyes and said something that sounded like "Watch for poop." Sure enough, the chimp finished the cheerleader segment of his act, then reached behind the driftwood like going for the gunny sack, filled his right hand, and sprayed ten thousand dollars worth of camera equipment with chimpanzee crap.

An hour later, the kids found us and were hungry. We bought shave ice, popcorn and Pepsi, sat on a warm concrete bench in the shade, munching and slurping while pigeons in paradise swarmed around us. I fed the birds in the manner of an American, broadcasting popcorn by the handful then watching the scramble. The monk carefully chose one kernel, held it between thumb and forefinger, zeroed in on one pigeon, fed that individual one piece of popcorn, then switched birds.

When done snacking, Delta and Max ran off to see the seals. The monk, using universal sign language, made it clear that he had to use the restroom. I pointed to the appropriate door, then stretched out on the bench and fell asleep. Tropical torpor.

The kids woke me an hour later, wondering where the monk was. I checked the men's room and the tiger cages, no monk, then began asking zoo visitors if they had seen a bald fellow in gold anywhere. A young couple from South Dakota said they had seen something like that down by the phone booths.

We found him sitting cross-legged on the grass, totally focused on a pay phone booth



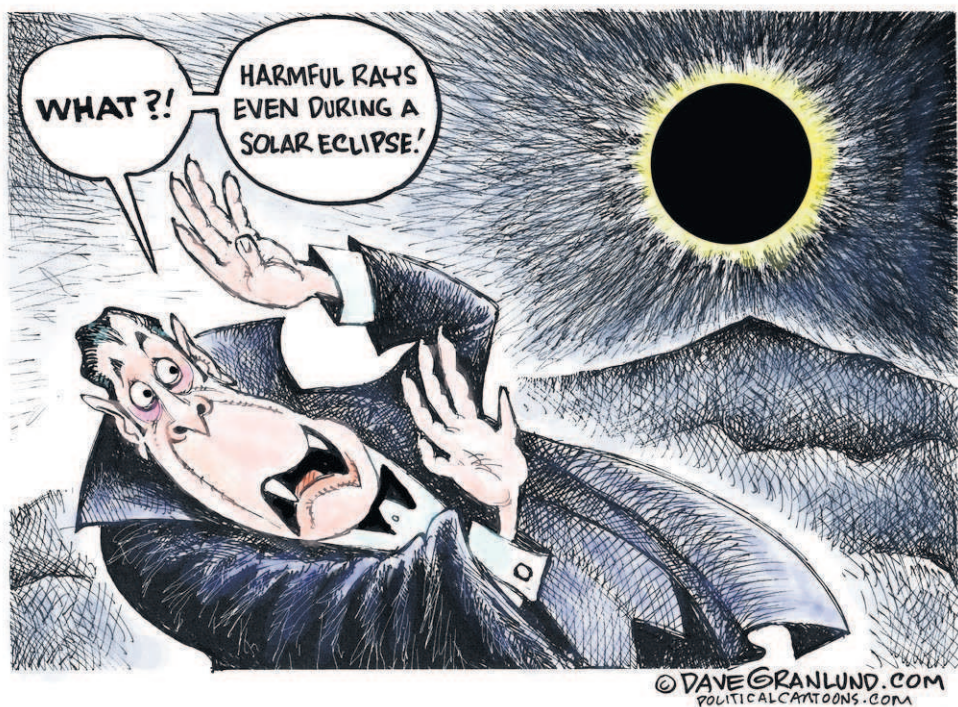
J.D. SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS
OF DRY CREEK

shaped like a clamshell. Max claimed he was asleep. I knelt beside him and gently tapped the face of his Timex. He snapped from his state of consciousness into ours, smiled, and followed us to the parking lot.

On the way back to Max's, over the noise of the kids discussing whether an elephant could beat up a killer whale, I am sure I heard the monk humming a few bars of "Love Me Tender."

J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.

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Quick takes

Nazis aren't Americans

Well written and you stated how I feel. Nazi ideals are NOT Americanism.

— Randy Smith

I stand against Nazis. I also stand against Antifa. How easy was that?

— Ryan Hamilton

Look into the faces of the remaining WWII veterans. For those who fought the Nazis and white nationalists, there was only one side worthy of their allegiance.

— Karen Spears Zacharias

Hermiston High debates where to hold graduation

Toyota Center? No. As a former Bulldogs volleyball coach living in Tri-Cities, please keep it in Hermiston because graduation is supposed to be at their own high school or else it's meaningless, especially an hour drive to get to the graduation.

— John Vball

Hermiston residents you need to open your mind to out of town venues. I graduated out of a class of 450 students. Our graduation was held at an event center 30 minutes from my high school. All that really mattered was that I was graduating, not where I was at when I was handed my diploma.

— Rachelle Owen Fleming

Keep it in Hermiston! Outside venue is practical for our area, ceremonies are held in the mid-morning before it's too hot. Kennison Field for my vote!

— Melissa Hurliman Pimentel

And rain? Wind?

— Kristopher Stiefel

Woman gets stuck in toilet after dropping phone

Are you telling me people have actually gone after their phones after dropping it in one of these disgusting bathrooms? Why people, why???

— Juan Rodolfo Jimenez

But did she get the phone?

— Teresa Thorpe Long

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.

Memories of Minamisoma

Six Pendleton High School students and two chaperones traveled to Japan earlier this month to visit Pendleton's sister city of Minamisoma. They returned with a newfound respect for world's great size—but also with the belief that people are more similar than different, filled with love and generosity. Below are a few of the students' final reflections on the trip, in their own words:

Emily Dittebrandt-Haney, 17

My experience in Japan was one to remember.

I'm glad that this was my first time leaving the country, and I couldn't have asked for a better trip. Although I was sick for over half of the trip, I still enjoyed it.

Everyone I met was nice and helpful—it was very nice of the doctor not to charge me for my visit, and for the foundation to pay for my prescription.

Some of my favorite parts of the trip were putting on the Samurai costumes, the tea ceremonies, trying on kimonos and visiting the beach and aquarium.

My host family was amazing. They helped me when I was sick and were very understanding. Nanami, my host sister, spoke very good English and that made it easy to communicate. Kozue, my host mom, was the best. She cared for me like her own, even though she didn't know me well.

Overall, my experience in Japan was amazing, and I hope to come back some day.

Daphny Chen, 16

As this trip is coming to a close, I've realized this trip has changed me as a person. I've made a family here that is irreplaceable. The generosity and the kindness that everyone here has shown me is life-changing.

I've seen temples, shrines, Tokyo, Minamisoma, and a whole world completely different but the same from my



Photo courtesy of Jessie Patterson

Students and chaperones from Pendleton dress in traditional Japanese regalia during a trip to Pendleton's sister city, Minamisoma, Japan.

own. The Minamisoma City International Association ladies put so much effort for our trip and they've blown me away. They've connected me to people I would have never known otherwise. These connections that will last a lifetime. I've met so many new people that will have a place in my heart forever. I hope to be able to go back as soon as possible.

Though we are busy every day, we always had time to our host families. Saying goodbye is the hardest part. I know I will cry and I'll miss my host family so much.

Communication is the hardest part. I wish I could understand and know what they're saying. I've never felt so at home even though home is thousands of miles away. We laughed together, ate together, shopped together, studied English together, played with fireworks together and watched morning dramas together. I was never lonely with Mama and Miyu-Chan around. They bickered like my own family and I felt at home weirdly. I will miss them so much.

Though we both were shy, Miyu and I seem to get along. That was probably the biggest relief for me. I hope I wasn't too much of a bother to her. She's talented in the flute and I

hope she goes far in the future. I know she'll do well. It's weird to have a sister my age. I've always been the oldest so I had the weirdest desire to protect her. We're not even blood related, but I hope she is happy.

Tonight she cried at the farewell party. I never thought she would cry. I guess she also felt the connection. I didn't want to cry tonight but I couldn't hold it in. I cried in a room full of people who don't know me. I'm embarrassed thinking about it now.

I guess I didn't think it would hurt as bad as it did. Sitting with them at the table, I realized they are my second family. Two weeks pass by rather quickly. If time could stop, I would like to be in that moment forever. They've changed me and my life.

Jessie Patterson, 17

My time in Japan has been, without a doubt, an incredible life-changing experience. The Minamisoma International Association has done an amazing job with not only organizing our trip, events and transportation, but making sure we have a variety of things to do every day.

I've greatly enjoyed learning about Japanese culture and customs, along with meeting

and befriending Japanese students, chaperones and my host family. Every single person we have come across has treated us with kindness and patience. The city of Minamisoma is just as beautiful as the people who live in it. Meeting the students at Haramachi High School was very special for me because I could see what life is like in Japan for someone my age.

I now feel as though I have a second home here in Minamisoma, due to the love, care and respect which my host family and the community has shown me. I will remember this for the rest of my life, and I hope I can return to this incredible place again one day.

Karin Power, chaperone

It is tempting to talk about Japan with a description of beautiful temples made of sculpted wood without nails, or amazing technology that rivals anything we have, or the brilliant greens of the rice fields and other hydroponic gardens scattered around the incredible mountainous landscape.

I could describe their horse festival with its 1,000-plus years of tradition and history with samurai in splendid costume. There are ladies on the bullet trains and crowded subways wearing silk kimonos. I could spend hours describing the beautiful presentation of scrumptious food. It is tempting.

But instead I want to describe the 81-year-old man that builds a "garbage box" in sweltering heat for a neighborhood that doesn't have one.

I want to describe his wife who volunteers to check up on students that are missing too much school to make sure they are ok. They are healthy and vibrant and they have a whole group of friends just like themselves.

They took us into their home for two whole weeks, cared for us as if we were family, which by the end of the time we wished we were. The people we met were so humble, so kind