

Packy Don Larew rides again

I was working though a case of the Sunday morning slows in a massive shopping center on the island of Oahu. I was attired in my usual, casual, drugstore cowpoke outfit of felt hat, Whites boots, snap shirt, dinner plate belt buckle and Wranglers, and was just two days of R and R beyond wading in the frozen slop on a feedlot job. I was also six hours on the downhill side of a last call double shot of Jim Beam with a beer back at the Wakiki Tiki Hut or Wannaleiu Inn, or some such dive.

I needed to atone for Saturday night excess, so I entered an Asian imports establishment and purchased a cobalt blue tea set, rimmed in gold filigree, with four enamel cups, and an assortment of oriental herbs. I was headed out on the gentle path to monkhood, to serenity, to washing from my psyche twenty years of wasted days and wasted nights.

I placed my new treasure on the top of a red Chevrolet rental car and was fumbling around with the door key when a group of tourists, dressed alike in white cotton shirts, dark pants, sensible shoes, fanny packs, and stubby-billed baseball caps, surged around the curve of the spiral parking lot, all of them walking backward and producing a

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lightning storm of flash bulb pops. Their focal points were three motorized camera dollies aimed at a black Buick cruiser that contained the Lord himself, Jack Lord, star of the Hawaii Five-O series, who was taping a product placement of the Ala Moana Center while executing an exciting two-minute sequence wherein tough homicide cops cruise through a shopping center parking lot and look like they are looking for someone.

I stood there, leaning on the Chevy door and witnessed the price of fame. Even as the crowd yelled his name and waved to him, Jack did not look happy in his stardom. Jack looked bored and sleepy and hung over, about as star-worthy as a bowl of poi. I don't think he was acting. He looked like he, too, had boogied one too many times to ukulele tunes the night before.

It took a good five minutes for the adoring procession to thin out enough for me to ease the car into the mess of traffic. As I was flipping the tranny into drive, two young women emerged from the tribe of Hawaii Five-O groupies, pointed my way, and began to chant what I understood to be "Packy Don Larew."

I was a hungover hick from Idaho. I had

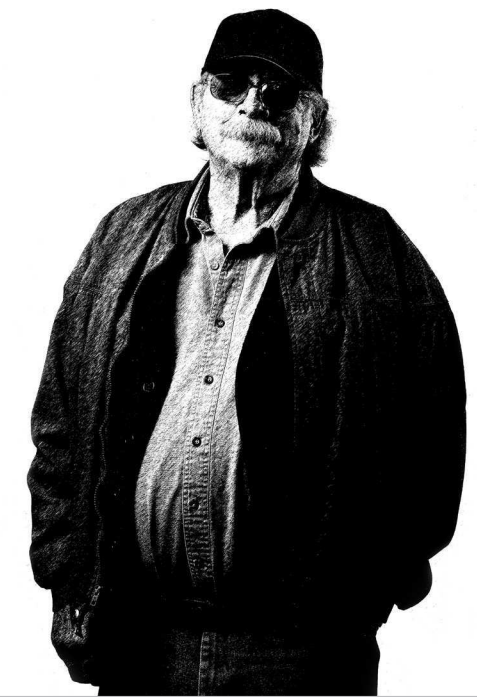
no idea who this Packy Don Larew person was, but I supposed, because of my cowboy garb, that I was being mistaken for some Roy Rogersque hero of the Asian cinema and was all too willing to participate in the harmless masquerade, to squeeze out my two minutes of fake fame.

I mustered my prettiest, "Aw shucks folks, thank you but I really must ride into the sunset" smile, accented by a tip of the hat to my fan base as I nudged the car into the stream of satisfied shoppers. I did notice that none of my fans were attempting to take my picture. They were just pointing my way and yelling, almost chanting, that name, "Packy Don Larew, Packy Don Larew."

As the original Latinos were wont to say, "Sic transit gloria mundi." I was a star of stage and screen right up until one of my adoring fans almost impaled herself on the rental car's hood ornament and I jammed on the brakes then watched my cobalt blue teapot and four little tea cups tumble down the windshield, over the hood and into pieces on the parking lot tarmac.

I finally realized that rather than being mistaken for a second-magnitude movie star, I was being politely informed by a group of English-as-second-or-third-language folks that, in my absent-minded un-Zen state of post-party buckaroodom, I had left a package on the roof of the car.

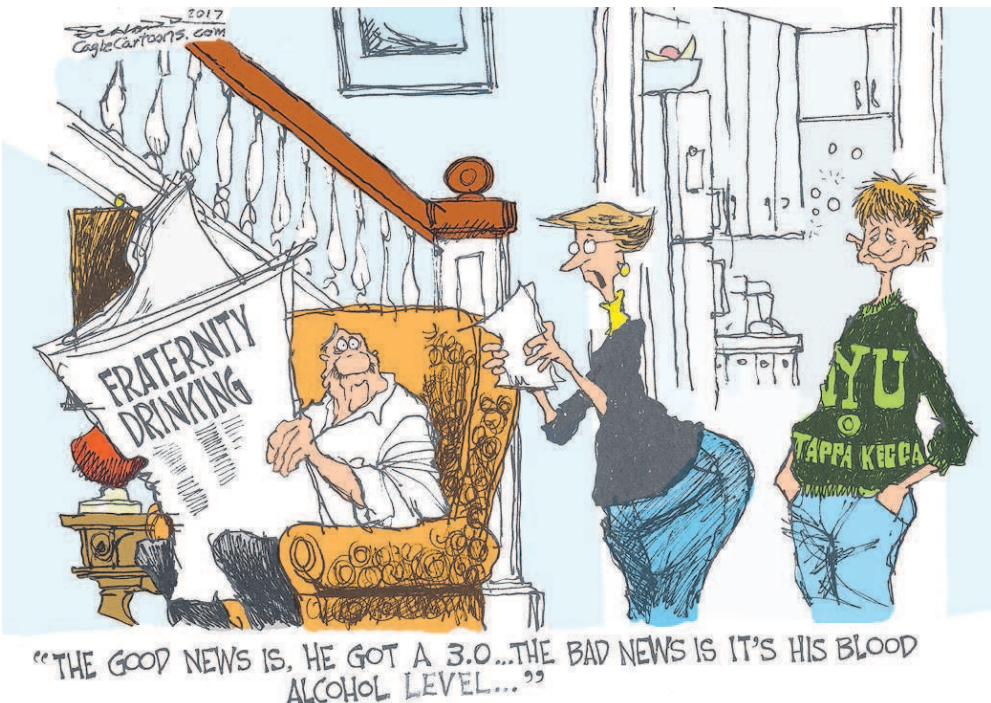
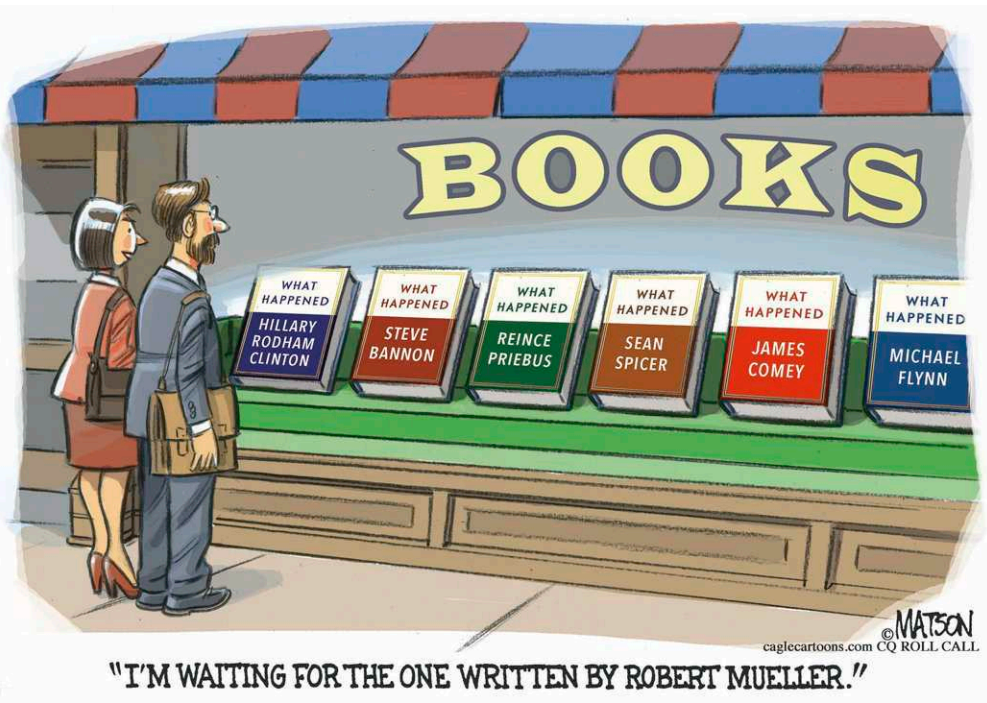
It took another ten years before I quit drinking alcohol. The precipitating event for my abstinence was not a horrible car wreck or broken nose or paternity suit. It came when my pal, Hester the Jester, suggested



J.D. SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS
OF DRY CREEK

that I should skip one Saturday night party just to see what it was like to wake up on Sunday morning actually feeling better than when I went to bed. It was great advice, and it stuck.

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



Quick takes

Bobby Mote decides to hang up his spurs

The first time I met Bobby Mote he was sleeping on my parent's floor after a high school rodeo in Hermiston. Last time I saw him we were on a flight that kept losing power before we could take off. We were sitting next to each other and we both wanted off that plane. Luckily we landed safely. Everyone called him Elvis. Glad he had a successful career.

— Jennifer Hamlin

Hermiston continues to debate graduation venue

As a parent of a senior at Hermiston High School I am very concerned with the "local" options. The gym has a major issue of limited seating. The football field still has the issue of limited seating and it adds the issue of unpredictability with the weather. The rodeo grounds have the major issue of cost as well as the unpredictability of weather. To me the Toyota Center is the only viable option.

— Jennifer Roberts

It needs to stay local, why are we concerned about weather? I've never heard anyone complain when they sit in terrible weather conditions at a professional football, baseball game, etc.

— Kacee Stewart

It's interesting the opinions of people who are more concerned with local business impacts than they are for the graduates and their families. End of the day, limited seating affects families, not the profit local businesses make.

— Fino Osorio

Pilot Rock battles a flock of nuisance turkeys

Solution = deep turkey fryer. Period.

— JanitorWillie

Yes, we have a turkey "problem." So what do we need? Only the help of the bureaucrats in the ODFW can remedy this great American turkey dilemma.

— the PatrioticTraitor

If a spotted owl can totally destroy the economy of the Pacific Northwest, imagine what a turkey can do.

— Central VA

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.

The new normal: wildfires all the time

In September 1982, my wife, Hilde, and I learned firsthand about wildfires during a backpacking trip in Northern California. While we were fly-fishing a creek miles from camp, we noticed a cloud of smoke drifting upstream. More smoke, thick smoke, soon followed, and then hot wind, and then we saw the first orange flames.

We had no choice but to run for our lives, trees exploding in bursts of flame not far behind us. After two hours we made it safely out of the forest, our white T-shirts splotted with red by the fire retardant dropped from overhead planes. If we hadn't been in good shape, we might have died.

Fast-forward to September 2017. The Klamath, Siskiyou and Cascade mountain ranges converge near the Oregon-California border to create an irreplaceable combination of co-existing ecosystems. In 2000, to protect this unique area, President Bill Clinton established the 86,774-acre Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. Then, in 2017, President Barack Obama expanded it by adding 48,000 acres.

Thanks to Donald Trump's Interior secretary, Ryan Zinke, a recommendation that would scale back the monument's size is currently under review. Zinke's proposal comes as no surprise. While serving as a congressman from Montana, he voted for a House resolution that would make it easier for the ownership of public lands to be transferred to the states.

After 50 years of hiking its trails and cross-country skiing its mountainsides, Hilde and I know the monument very well, and we welcomed its creation and expansion. Whenever the weather allows, after a workout or some yard work, we take



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Comment

a late morning break in lawn chairs near the eastern edge of our southern Oregon property, sipping coffee and talking while we admire the monument's impressive mountains 15 miles away.

But not this summer. The view has been obscured by smoke from eight nearby wildfires sparked by July and August lightning strikes, so we've been watching the mountains through a grim haze of gray-brown smoke.

Recently, the smoke was exceptionally thick, the monument's mountains invisible. A prominent knoll rising above a lake a mile from our home could barely be seen through the acrid haze. The Chetco Bar Fire, over 125,000 acres and growing by the hour, was threatening the coastal town of Brookings. We have close friends living on the North Umpqua River who were now at stage 2 evacuation preparedness. The morning news warned that the fires would likely burn until mid-October. As September began, we read that 81 large fires had burned 1.4 million acres, and at least eight Western states were suffering from dense, smoky air that turned the morning sun red.

We talked about all of that, and about the contrasting problem of Houston, where we also have friends, and where more rain had fallen in two days than the Rogue Valley gets in two years; and then about the Texas Republicans who voted against federal aid for East Coast victims of Hurricane Sandy, thereby creating an opportunity to confess to their world-class hypocrisy by voting, as they should, in favor of aid for their own

state; and finally about how, according to science, as opposed to Chinese hoaxes, summer wildfires will soon become the new normal: the rural West frequently ablaze. Since the day we ran for our lives, Hilde and I have witnessed a steady progression toward this awful outcome.

And then we were saved from absolute depression. We were sitting no more than 10 feet from a birdbath, and behind the birdbath was the wire fence that separates us from our neighbor down the hill. A flock of eight Western bluebirds arrived and perched on the low limb of a nearby oak. The birds studied us briefly, decided we were all right, and fluttered down to the bath together to splash vigorously for several minutes. No sooner had they flown off than two perfectly formed and overlapping V's of stridently honking Canada geese, 100 birds or more, flew directly over our heads, so low that we could hear their slow, powerful wing-beats. Shortly after the geese disappeared, our neighbors' horses, two mares and a gelding, came to the fence so we could feed them their daily feast of apples from our tree.

So birds and animals helped us through a dreary day, and sooner or later, if not in October then in November, the rains will come and the fires will be extinguished and the sky will clear once again.

But then comes next summer, and all the summers after that, and running away won't work.

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