

Take the present over the perfect

The line to the dock was short. We had just missed the 8 o'clock ferry and were now front and center for the 8:30 with thoughts of the day ahead filling every ounce of the wait. The sky was gray, but not the heavy kind of gray that adds extra weight. It was a gray that seemed to allow the reds, yellows, and oranges of the nearby trees permission to boldly say "Look at me! I'm changing into something beautiful just for you!" It was a gray that seemed to be welcoming us to add our own color to the day, as well as slowing us down long enough to see our own reflections in the soft and still of just being quiet.

My sister and I had just shared a double bed in our cousin's home in West Seattle for a few short but restful hours, and were now on our way to Whidbey Island for a long overdue day with our 92-year-old grandmother. The ferry ride was calming, with only a slight breeze and very little commotion. We sat in chairs inside the deck window and talked about soccer schedules, football games, marriage, stresses at work, and even quick meals our families had enjoyed recently. Why had we not made time for these conversations until now? How do the four hours we live apart keep us from connecting more regularly?

Our drive from the south end of the island to the north wound its way through farmland,

evergreens, and beautiful deciduous trees dropping their leaves — allowing freedom to swirl through the air. The glimpses of the water caught our eyes, and we both noticed the familiar signs and landmarks that have filled our hearts for years.

We passed by the hospital we'd spent hours in — singing and praying our Papa Roy through the last few days of his life. We crossed the intersection that led to the cemetery our family had released handfuls of beautiful red balloons from with my Grams leading us in "I'll Fly Away." And as we drove, we reminisced about the beautiful moments and memories this island has given us, anticipating more to come in the hours that lie ahead.

With an eight-ounce decaf caramel macchiato in hand for Grams, a box of our favorite donuts, and a ramekin filled with the treasured family favorite — rice pudding — we made our way into the care facility our beautiful grandmother has called home for the past seven years. The hallway was lined with beautiful seascape photographs, and the porch outside room 201 held the flowers that told us we were in the right place. Joy was evident and soaked our souls. We knocked with care and then ushered ourselves into the room, greeted by a quiet, yet happy shout of "Oh girls ... hooray ... you're here!" The next few hours were filled with

conversations, laughter, questions, answers, and even bits of advice I hope to hold onto for the rest of my life. We shared a meal together in the large dining hall, completed a crossword puzzle successfully, updated school pictures on the wall, took a short nap, FaceTimed with my parents, brother-in-law and nieces, shared a to-go order of delicious fish 'n' chips for dinner, and loved each other the best we knew how. Tears fell and were wiped away, laughter filled the quiet, and even the soft snores of true rest were welcoming. Those hours were priceless in every sort of way.

Time is something we have very little of these days — no matter what age we find ourselves at. My sister and I, like most women our age, move at a very fast pace, filling every second we have with something ... anything ... everything. But that day, those nine hours, they seemed to be the slowest and steadiest of hours either of us had recently spent. They put the brakes on our screaming, roller coaster-paced life, giving us just enough time to stop and honor each other and our grandmother with the gift of being present over perfect.

That day with our grandmother — even in the short dose that is was — allowed us to rest, not only physically but mentally. It brought us back to simplicity and a rhythm of being who we've been created to be. Being present over perfect, slow over rushed, and calm over chaotic that day gave my sister and me meaning over mania, but it also gave our grandmother an opportunity to see us slow down long enough to truly show her what she means to us. Those unrushed hours offered each of us treasured time with no expectations, which is exactly what many of us crave.

As the holidays approach, and time with family and friends fill the spaces of our



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calendars, may we all look for, and vow to create, opportunities to experience the tremendous value in finding time, as well as making time, to connect with those we love most.

May we slow down long enough for the layers of expectations and pressures to fall away — making room for the present. Because that time you find and give is truly the perfect "present." And, according to my 92-year-old Grams, can't be bought, but is worth absolutely everything!

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What to do about wild horses?

Imagine a proposal to introduce an exotic species to the sagebrush steppe of the American West. This species could successfully reproduce and expand into forested areas, uplands and wetlands. It would be a large charismatic creature that attracted a passionate following — people who loved it so much that the management of its expanding population would be restricted by law. Some of them would be so passionate that armed guards would be necessary at academic meetings about the species.

The downside of this beautiful animal would be that it outcompeted native wildlife, plants and insects, degraded water sources and turned grasslands into deserts of cheat grass or dust. As its numbers increased, native species would be devastated.

The cost to the public of supporting these creatures would increase each year until it was projected to exceed \$1 billion in 20 years or so. And ultimately, when the natural resources were exhausted, many would starve or die of thirst.

Clearly, this is a difficult scenario to support. It was not envisioned by Congress when legislators passed the 1971 Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. The act directed the Bureau of Land Management to manage free-roaming horses to "maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship."

The law has been amended several times to address the health of the land and management of the horses. It allows for the humane "removal or destruction" of "excess" animals "so as to restore a thriving natural ecological balance to the range, and protect the range from the deterioration associated with overpopulation."

The act further details practices like the removal of old and sick animals as well as the removal of horses from private land — private landowners are forbidden from shooting them off. It also covers proper adoption procedures. But in reality, due to lobbying efforts by horse advocates, actions by Congress and the lack of adequate horse management funding for the BLM, the wild horse population has exploded beyond the tipping point, both ecologically and economically.

I recently attended the National Wild Horse and Burro Summit in Salt Lake City — the meeting I mentioned earlier that required armed guards. Most of the attendees were academics, presenting research papers detailing the effects of overpopulation of horses and burros on rangeland ecosystems. Outside were demonstrators who dubbed the meeting the "Slaughter Summit."

Go to the websites of wild horse advocates, and you'll be told that wild horses,



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unlike their domestic counterparts, cannot overgraze or harm other wildlife species, and that they are native to North America, despite arriving on Spanish ships alongside pigs, cattle and sheep.

These supporters further argue that if only greedy ranchers would stop raising cattle and sheep, an infinite grass resource would exist for an exponentially expanding wild horse herd. Never mind that those ranchers produce food, manage the resource and support their local economies and communities.

The arguments of these advocates are countered by facts on www.BLM.gov.

Forty-six years ago, an estimated 17,300 feral horses and 8,045 burros were on the range. In March 2017, about 73,000 horses were counted on the range. Another 46,000 were held in corrals, 29 percent of the total, and "eco-sanctuaries" held 1 percent.

These feral horses cost the BLM about \$50 million per year, or 63 percent of the agency's total annual budget of \$80.4 million. Adoption, which is difficult and costs about \$4,500 per horse, has declined by 70 percent over the past 10 years to 2,912 in 2016.

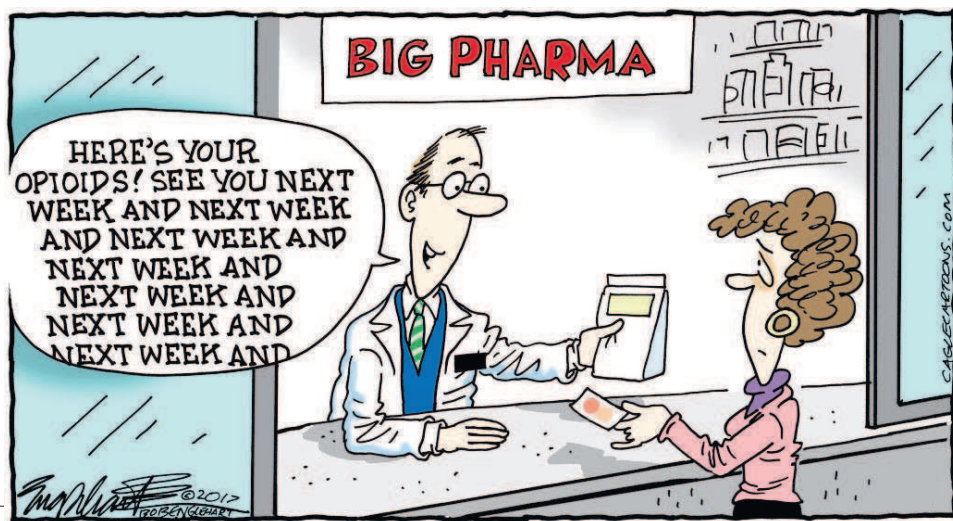
Fertility control has helped some, but the drug PZP must be administered every year to each mare. This is physically impossible in large rugged horse management areas, and it requires horse "gathers," which some advocates consider unnatural and overly stressful. Spaying is not safe, because the mares are pregnant virtually all the time. Left unchecked, each herd increases by 20 per cent every year and doubles in four or five years. These numbers do not include the estimated 100,000 animals within Native American reservations.

Beyond the numbers is the heart-breaking reality — because everyone, really, is a horse-lover at heart. In our area, many of the horse advocates work hard for the horses and do not want to "love them to death." Some even adopt animals.

Fringe "advocates" have been effective at lobbying against the slaughter of old, unadoptable — or really any — horses. Only 10 states have horse management areas, and most of their congressional representatives want to find a better solution.

It is easy for people in the other 40 states to be swayed by the extremists. Their efforts are responsible for the current situation, in which taxpayers support at least 80,000 excess horses, leaving us with no end in sight, not in numbers, not in funding, not in ecological damage. What is a real-world solution?

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The bold rise of China's president

The cover of the Oct. 14 issue of *The Economist* carries a picture of China's President Xi Jinping and labels him as "The world's most powerful man." Really? How has Xi achieved his tight grip on power in just five years? What is his background? What is his leadership style?

Congress: Xi is currently being analyzed extensively in the Western press because China's ruling Communist Party is just concluding its five-year congress in Beijing. Xi is expected to win a second and possibly final five-year term.

Leadership: From a review of Xi's presidency, I note his supremely self-confident leadership, employing significantly his "princeling" status as the son of a Communist revolutionary under Mao Zedong who came to power and established the Republic of China in 1949. In a form of Neo-Maoism, Xi has thus far championed a strict, one-man, one-party, no-dissent rule over 1.4 billion Chinese, letting fall by the wayside expected political and economic reforms that had begun to percolate under the leadership of the technocrats before him. Political power has been everything for him.

Background: Much indeed is made of Xi as a "princeling," those called the "Red Generation" who are children of those who fought and served with Mao. There is a whole cadre of "princelings" who have been certain that they have a natural claim to leadership.

I found a detailed biography of Xi by Evan Osnos in the April 2015 *New Yorker*. It tells how Xi, born in 1953 in Beijing, grew up in relative luxury because his father was a prominent senior official in the first years under Mao. Then Mao created the hugely disruptive Red Guard. Xi's father was detained by the Red Guards in 1967, accused of being a class enemy, and the teen age Xi was forced to denounce his father several times.

When Mao ordered the Red Guards and all students to the countryside to be reeducated, Xi went to his father's old stronghold province in Shaanxi. He tried to flee but was forcefully returned and now uses his experience of living in a cave dwelling as his story of being "reborn" as a loyal Communist Party cadre.

Evidently viewing the Party as the one and only route ahead, in spite of the ill treatment of himself and his family, he thereafter sought repeatedly to join the CP Youth League and finally was accepted after many rejections; and he went on to university.

Mao rehabilitated his father to a senior position and the father procured for his son a first job in the defense establishment. After that, the young Xi served in the eastern provinces, growth engines of China's economy, steadily rising through

the ranks.

In that period, he was considered very adept at managing his image and his relationships, including with the military. He avoided controversial reforms.

A U.S. interlude occurred in 1985 when he spent two weeks as part of an agricultural delegation to Iowa and met Terry Branstad, who was serving his first term as governor of Iowa. They met again on several occasions and that has led President Trump to tap Branstad as the next U.S. Ambassador to China.

In 1986, Xi, a divorcée, met his current wife an opera and folk singer who was then far more famous than Xi.

It was during his assignment to Shanghai that his big opportunity came. At the CP Congress in 2012, party elders decided to elevate princelings, different from those leaders previously chosen for academic or technocratic merit. When Xi became president that year, four out of the seven men on the Politburo Standing Committee were princelings, more than any ratio since the beginning of the republic.

Fast Rise: Astonishingly, just two years into his presidency, Xi was already being called the strongest president since Deng Xiaoping. He has used his father's prestige, his fellow princeling contacts and his carefully cultivated credibility with the military to launch his presidency forcefully from the beginning. He has used a draconian anti-corruption campaign to quell rivals, including formerly untouchable top party and military officials. He soon replaced collective decision making with one-man rule, supremely confident of his ability to manage singlehandedly.

His titles and power have grown through his assuming leadership of dozens of small committees, old and newly created, that bypass regular governance circles. His fear-raising campaign against dissent in the last three years includes a renewal of Mao-style forced confessions. In foreign policy, he has been assertive in promoting China as a unique and leading world power — and in assuming the role of leader of "globalization."

My next column will look more closely at Xi's policies and his philosophy. They can help determine whether, now that he is cementing another five-year term and promoting his allies into wide-ranging positions, he may relax his thus far authoritarian, non-reformist policies for China, at least in part for needed economic changes. And, important too, is to gain a better sense of where Xi might take China on the global scene and in China's relations with the United States.

Ambassador Harriet Isom grew up in Pendleton. She was a career diplomat.

