

# Holding each other up



## BETTE HUSTED FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE

trying to, anyway.” I hope you can join us at Pendleton Center for the Arts at 7 p.m. on January 18. I’m betting he succeeds.

*Bette Husted is a writer and a student of T'ai Chi and the natural world. She lives in Pendleton.*

If you happened to pass Pendleton Center for the Arts during the short hours of daylight on December 21, you might have seen something startlingly beautiful. Art was emerging from the building, a long white scroll with calligraphy-like black swirls flowing down the steps and out toward the sidewalk. It was an invitation, a welcome. Sam Roxas-Chua had come to town.

Abandoned in the fold of a tree branch after his birth in the Philippines, Roxas-Chua was adopted by Chinese-Filipino family who later emigrated to the United States, so it seems only natural that his work illustrates the importance of connections. He didn't just read that night at the First Draft Writers' Series. He sang — and painted, too. His poems begin in the body, he explained, showing us how his brush swirls until it finds the image that will become words. Oh, this is a poem about water. Falling. Birds. Words, visual art, and music — for him, there is no separation.

We loved him. He's the perfect writer, I thought, for this night. In all this darkness, he's helping us tip toward the light.

But I kept picturing that infant balanced so precariously in a tree. That small, vulnerable body. How close Sam had come

to that darkness.

In less than a week I would be facing a death in my own extended family, not of a child but of one barely become a man. The loss of such a young life has brought an especially deep sorrow.

How do people bear the unbearable? We hold each other. And somehow, we hold each other up.

Rituals help. For this young man, there was the recitation of the rosary and a funeral mass. The dressing, the Washat service, songs and prayers and spoken tributes, memories, tears. A naming. The ritual of his burial

beside his mother, another too-young death the family still grieves. Shaking hands in the longhouse, the meal shared at those long tables. Next December, there will be a memorial and stone-setting.

Children help, too. We can hold them and pretend it is we who are helping them.

And words. Even at a time when my own words felt inadequate, I found myself thanking others for theirs, gifts they found within themselves when they themselves could hardly speak. Help each other, I heard. Ask for help. Acknowledge your pain. Look for kindness.

Why does it comfort us to share our sorrow? Earlier, when Sam let his Facebook

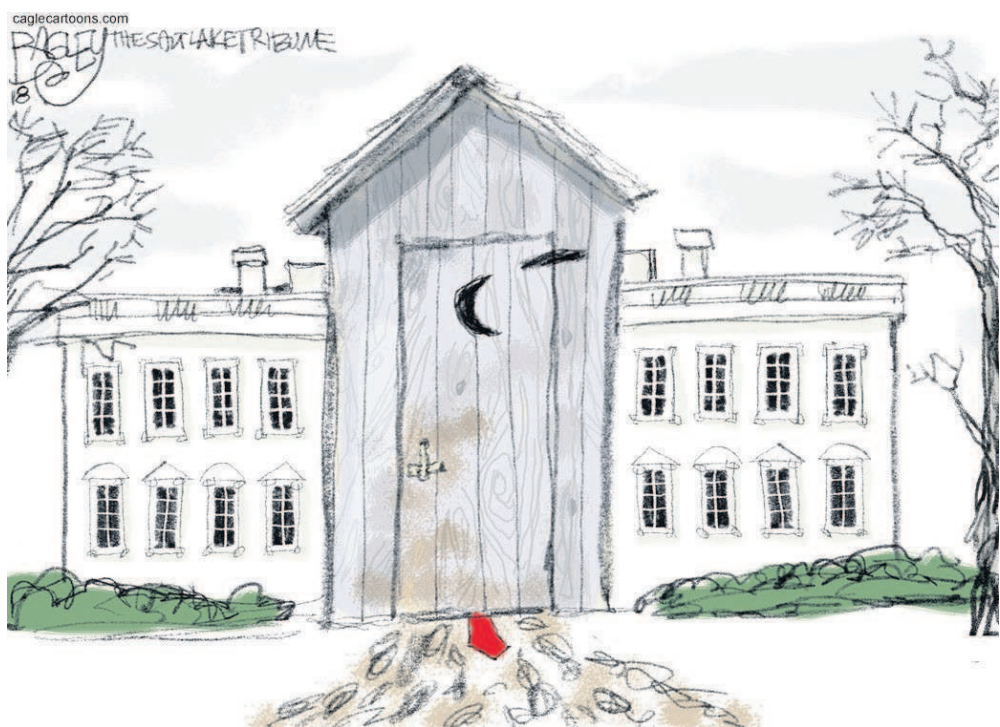
friends know how difficult he was finding the days following the loss of his dog, I sent him a poem, one the former poet laureate Ted Kooser had shared with readers of his weekly newspaper column American Life in Poetry — in the hope, he said, that we would join him in wishing his yellow lab Harold well on his “journey to the stars.”

“The next morning, I felt that our house / had been lifted away from its foundation / during the night, and was now adrift ... taking my wife and me with it ... for fifteen years / our dog had held down what we had / by pressing his belly to the floors, / his front paws, too, and with him gone / the house had begun to float out onto / emptiness, no solid ground in sight.”

Can we find words for the loss of the people we love? We search for them, because the images that flow out the doorway of the isolated self can help us recognize that though each of us carries our own anguish in our own heart, our grief is connected to the grief of others. And when we reach out, acknowledging our pain, we hold each other up. Last week at St. Andrew's and at the longhouse I felt people doing just that.

Laughter can bear us up, too, and during these dark days it is good to remember that. January's First Draft writer will be Steve Chrisman, who came to Pendleton for serious positions in economic development and airport management but whose real passion, he says, is making people laugh, “or

## How do people bear the unbearable?



## Recycling and international trade

Being a local politician keeps a person in touch with the constituency.

Whether it is the grocery store, going out to eat, trying to work out at the gym, social functions, service club meetings or church, it's hard to be there just for the intended purpose. I guess it comes with the territory.

But all of that being said, after one particularly interactive day I came home thinking that perhaps a trip to Pendleton Sanitary Service's recycling center near Fallen Field might be an escape.

Shortly after arrival, we met a new resident who was trying to figure out what to do with her plastic. We tried to politely inform her that China had stopped taking plastic and so there were problems disposing of it at the recycling center.

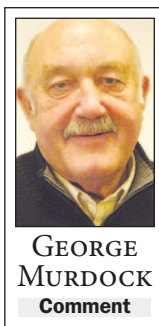
Frustrated, she tried to figure out what China had to do with getting rid of her plastic. My wife explained that it would appear China had historically consumed a lot of America's plastic but that was no longer the case. The lady wondered if it was political and were they mad at President Trump? We tried to assure her that while international relations may not be at a high point in our history, that didn't include his desire to deny our plastic to nations that might find a use for it.

“Well,” she advised us, “the last she had heard they were taking it in another state.” My wife reminded her China hadn't specified any particular states and they probably weren't exempt from the new rules that we think went into effect the first of the year.

In fact, China has historically consumed a great deal of the world's plastic and turned it into a variety of products. As the citizenry of that country has become more westernized, they have adopted our recycling habits and now have enough of their own plastic. Importing more would give them the same disposal issues now confronting the United States.

About this time, a gentleman drove into the recycling lot in a pickup with two dogs in the back. He announced he was training the dogs to stay in the truck. It was apparently early in the training routine because the dogs found the full expanse of the center full of interesting smells and discoveries.

He joined the discussion of “What, no plastic disposal?” Again, the conversation led to the fact China was no longer accepting plastic and were they mad at President Trump? He said “You know, it's a petroleum product,” as he simultaneously tried to control the dogs that were circling through our legs. He never explained the relationship



GEORGE MURDOCK  
Comment

between the fact it was a petroleum product and the new rules, although we said we thought there was another reason.

In both cases, while we were all weighing important international issues surrounding plastic exportation, no one recognized us and so we didn't have to explain the role of Umatilla County in this matter. In truth, the county has no jurisdiction over international plastic trade or relations with China but that is never a total sanctuary.

I admittedly arrived later than some to the values of recycling for reasons I won't elaborate on at this point. But having emerged from the important debate surrounding plastics, China, and the president, the experience led to a few other discoveries.

- 20,000,000 Hershey kisses are produced every day consuming 113 square miles of tin foil — most of which is recyclable — who knew?

- It took 500,000 trees to produce last Sunday's newspapers.

- If all newspapers were recycled, we could save 250 million trees a year.

- We produce 350,000 aluminum cans per minute. If the can is thrown away, it is still a can 500 years from now. If it is recycled, six weeks from now it will be part of a new can and there is no limit to how many times the process can be repeated.

I learned a little in the process even if it wasn't a total escape and in some ways, simply focusing on the subject of plastics served as a distraction from the normal visit to the recycling center.

Many times fellow visitors to the center are vigilant with regard to infractions such as slipping cardboard into the newspaper bin, putting glass in the tin can container, or simply dumping everything into one container or even next to a container believing that just taking it to the recycling center in the first place is a sufficient contribution to saving Mother Earth.

And, with the temperature hovering below 30 degrees, the visit was safer than previous occasions like the time a visitor with a truck load of empty bottles, at least one of which had been consumed recently, parked fifty yards away and began aiming at the glass container and throwing the bottles in that general direction one at a time.

There is some pressure for curbside recycling but that would eliminate the opportunity for us to join with our neighbors in a social and political setting on behalf of improving our environment.

George Murdock is a Umatilla County Commissioner.

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## ‘Desert Solitaire’ turns 50

Fifty years ago, Edward Abbey's “Desert Solitaire” was published to decent reviews but little fanfare. “Another book dropped down the bottomless well. Into oblivion,” wrote a disheartened Abbey in his journal Feb. 6, 1968.

Yet it has remained in print for a half-century and created a devoted following. After President Donald Trump and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke carved 2 million acres out of Bears Ears and Grand-Staircase-Escalante national monuments, both in the heart of Abbey Country, “Desert Solitaire” remains more relevant today than ever.

An account of Abbey's time as a ranger in what is now Arches National Park, “Desert Solitaire” is both memoir and a passionate defense of our nation's last unspoiled land. In spirit, though, his book resembles a 1960s nonfiction novel. Sometimes howlingly funny, it compresses the two postwar decades Abbey spent in Utah and Arizona into a single “season in the wilderness.”

“Do not jump in your automobile next June and rush out to the canyon country hoping to see some of that which I have attempted to evoke in these pages,” he famously wrote. “In the first place, you can't see anything from a car; you've got to get out of the goddamned contraption and walk, better yet crawl, on hands and knees, over the sandstone and through the thornbush and cactus. When traces of blood begin to mark your trail, you'll see something, maybe. Probably not. In the second place most of what I write about in this book is already gone or going under fast. This is not a travel guide but an elegy.”

By the time Abbey wrote that, his beloved Glen Canyon was “going under fast,” gurgling beneath Lake Powell as the Glen Canyon Dam plugged the Colorado River's flow. The fact that Arches and Canyonlands national monuments would later become national parks was of little comfort to Abbey, who in “Desert Solitaire” bemoans what he termed the “industrial tourism” that revolves around the automobile.

Compared to Abbey's fierce opposition to modern capitalism, Bernie Sanders comes off as comparatively milquetoast. Above all, Abbey was an opponent of “that cloud on my horizon” he defined as progress. This wasn't Luddism so much as a deep need to preserve a small portion of America as wilderness, kept forever free



JOHN BUCKLEY  
Comment

from development, beginning with precisely those areas of southern Utah attacked by Trump and Zinke.

“Desert Solitaire” was published four years after the Wilderness Act was signed into law. Even as the United States' economy boomed, in 1964 Congress sanctified areas where “the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Abbey fought to preserve such land for the rest of

his life. “Wilderness complements and completes civilization,” he wrote in the 1980s. “I might say that the existence of wilderness is a compliment to civilization.

Any society that feels itself too poor to afford the preservation of wilderness is not worthy of the name of civilization.”

As Trump and Zinke reclaim for extractive industry much of the land that had been protected through the Antiquities Act by Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, Abbey's spirit infuses the opposition. More than a few dog-eared and well-thumbed paperback copies of his book were probably in

the backpacks of the thousands protesting Trump on Dec. 4, when he arrived in Salt Lake City to announce his land grab.

But Abbey, who died in 1989, wouldn't be surprised by Trump and Zinke's attitudes. He'd instantly spot them as more of the know-nothing exploiters he'd always railed against. It also wouldn't surprise him that drilling in the Alaska National Wilderness Refuge was the price the GOP paid to secure Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski's vote for tax reform. Having called the cattlemen whose herds graze on public land “welfare queens,” he'd appreciate being vindicated by Cliven Bundy, whose trial in Nevada for crimes that began with his refusal to pay for federal grazing fees ended in a mistrial Jan. 8.

He'd probably also say, “What else did you expect?” after learning that so many tourists in cars are entering Arches, Grand Teton, Bryce and Zion national parks that buses and reservation systems have begun or are in the works. And I think he'd be saddened that, 50 years after the publication of “Desert Solitaire,” the assault on public lands — our lands — remains such a fact of American life.

John Buckley is a contributor to High Country News. He is a Washington novelist and CEO of a creative advocacy firm.

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