

The necessity of vulnerability

I've been thinking about vulnerability. So have you, I'm sure. The cover story in last Saturday's *East Oregonian* showed a barred security gate at Pendleton High School and included words like "fortress" and "securing the perimeter."

PHS students and teachers are planning a march to say they are tired of feeling vulnerable to school shootings, even as others argue against restrictions on firearms, insisting that guns make us less vulnerable. Arm the teachers.

The one thing we agree on is that we don't want to feel vulnerable. To a great extent, that's what the #MeToo movement is about: women, and men too, saying no. No more.

Yet there I was last week, joining students and community members who had gathered in a BMCC classroom for a conversation about creativity, vulnerability, and art. "What We Risk," slam poet Jason Graham had titled his Oregon Humanities Conversation Project. We were there to share ideas about another kind of vulnerability. The necessary kind. The kind that makes us human.

Not everyone takes the risks a creative artist takes — opening herself to criticism or misunderstanding, rejection, ridicule — in

some places, imprisonment or death — but anyone who has held his child in his arms knows what it means to accept vulnerability. Opening our hearts to a partner means knowing we will have to face the eventual loss of that person.

And — dogs. Do we do that for practice, I sometimes wonder? Devastated as we are when the dog dies, as they all do, we get another puppy. Or we head to PAWS, pretending that we're rescuing a dog instead of being rescued ourselves.

To come to the First Draft Writers' Series is to accept this necessary kind of human vulnerability. You don't have to be a featured writer or share at the open mic to experience it. All you have to do is listen.

Sometimes the writer's willingness to accept risk is obvious. "It's been six years since Jennie died," we heard the Osage writer Ruby Hanson Murray's soft, steady voice reading last month, "and I've barely spoken about her death. I'm sharing my experience because I hope if we lighten the judgment and shame some people associate with domestic violence, overdose, or suicide, we can help each other." Her fellow writer Dawn Pichon Barron was fearless, too; her chapbook *Escape Girl Blues* took us "under the bridge where we

hide ... nowhere to go but the river."

Often the risk isn't so obvious. But the thing all writers risk, and their readers and listeners risk too, is the possibility of connection. We are like Walt Whitman's "noiseless patient spider" casting our fragile filament into the universe hoping the gossamer thread will "catch somewhere." It might not. But when it does, when you hear a poem that says exactly how you feel but couldn't have put into words — didn't know anyone could — well, there it is, that shiver of human recognition.

And you never know when you'll hear it. High school students reading from their phones can open doors you didn't know were there. One night an open mic reader sang a poem about domestic abuse — a combination no one expected — that stunned everyone in the room.

"We talk about the vulnerability of sharing our work publicly," photographer John Paul Caponigro acknowledged. I don't think we talk enough about the real vulnerability involved in making art; if we truly engage the process we are changed by it." As a writer, of course, I agree with him. I think what he said is true for readers, too, and for those of us who are fortunate enough to get to hear writers read directly to us.

This belief in the kind of vulnerability that makes us human is what kept me in the classroom all those years, helping people connect with stories and learn to tell their own.

And now? What stories will we tell

The kind of vulnerability that makes us human is what kept me in the classroom all those years.



BETTE HUSTED FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE

as our children practice hiding in their school classroom closets? It's an important question. And it's a reason artists know they must risk everything.

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



The Second Amendment's misplaced comma

Let me be clear. I like guns. I've owned several. Including the .22 caliber single shot rifle my father gave to me when I was about ten. Trouble was I couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. However, one day I was down in our pasture and tried to kill a crow. But I soon learned that I could hit the living room wall of our neighbor. Never saw the rifle again. And I have never had a defensive use for a gun. At best I would shoot myself in the foot.

But, during my service with USO in Vietnam I inherited from some departing Marines an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle (the murder weapon in the Parkland school) and an awesome Russian AK-47 Kalashnikov assault rifle. I never fired either one.

I also had the opportunity to stare down the muzzle of .45 caliber Thompson submachine gun (a Tommy gun). It had been leveled at my chest by an angry Marine who demanded that I sell him another hot dog or else he would shoot me. I was in this pickle because we had a snack bar rule that limited each Marine to two hot dogs. I had imposed this rule because we received a limited number of hot buns every morning from a Navy bakery and so, following the rules, a Vietnamese employee had refused to sell him another one.

After his threat, I told the off-kilter Marine that if he killed me the Marines standing in line behind him would shoot him dead. Appreciating the reality of this he walked out the door.

I also owned a Ruger .38 caliber snub-nosed revolver. During the Tet Offensive of 1966 I was living in an apartment in Saigon. One night I heard some gunfire so I ran upstairs to the roof. Suddenly I was being shot at from two directions — a North Vietnamese sniper and a Marine sniper in a nearby hotel where some Marines lived.

So, I did what any manly man would do. I ran back down the stairs and into my bedroom. But not before I grabbed a bottle of cognac and my Ruger. There I slept the night away clutching both. A month later I traded the worthless Ruger for 20 sheets of plywood. I still have the bullet the NVA had shot at me, which hit the stairwell.

In 1966, an officer of the 1st Marine Division had already told me how much damage just one of those bullets could wreak on a human body.

A Florida radiologist wrote about his experience with AR-15 killings in the February 22 *Handgun* magazine's website: "In a typical handgun injury that I diagnose almost daily, a bullet leaves a laceration through an organ like the liver. To a radiologist, it appears as a linear, thin, gray bullet track through the organ. There may be



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bleeding and some bullet fragments.

I was looking at a CT scan of one of the victims of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, who had been brought to the trauma center during my call shift. The liver looked like an overripe melon smashed by a sledgehammer, with extensive bleeding. How could a gunshot wound have caused this much damage?"

The president and Congress should not deliberately overlook the fact that the use of AR-15 rifles is the common denominator in many mass shootings.

Yet, the National Rifle Association has labeled the AR-15 "America's most popular rifle." Yeah, right. Some facts from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention:

Since 1968 more than 1.5 million Americans have been killed in the U.S. in gun-related incidents. In one year on average, more than 100,000 people in America are shot in murders, assaults, suicides and suicide attempts, accidents, or by police intervention.

And in one year on average more than 18,000 American children and teens (ages 0-19) are also shot in murders, assaults, suicides and suicide attempts, accidents, or by police intervention.

But, thank the Lord, we have those intelligent and savvy students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, to show us the way forward.

But, we adults will all have to come to terms with the fact that the Second Amendment—which the NRA has enshrined—is all about a misplaced comma.

Congress ratified the Amendment on December 15, 1791. The first 10 amendments form the Bill of Rights. The Second Amendment reads: "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

But most Constitutional scholars agree that it has nothing to do with an individual's right to bear arms. It's really about well-regulated militias like the National Guard up at the Pendleton Airport. Because in 1791, the federal government couldn't afford to maintain a standing army to protect all 13 states so our founders encouraged local riflemen to form into well-regulated militias.

What the founders' use of commas reveals was what they really meant to say was "Because a well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the rights of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

So, Google away.
Tom Hebert is a writer and public policy consultant living outside Pendleton.

Feeling seedy as spring approaches

As the newest crop of seed catalogs arrives in the mail, my thoughts turn to next summer's garden and to the words of Tim Cahill, the adventure writer: "I am a man who sits around at home reading wilderness survival books the way some people peruse seed catalogs or accounts of classic chess games," Cahill wrote in "Jaguars Ripped My Flesh."

As a compulsive peruser of seed catalogs, I think it's a fair comparison. All three of these pursuits can occur in one's socks or slippers, over a cup of tea. They all invoke issues of survival, but gardening requires the most integrated of skill sets, combining the strategy and foresight of a chess master with the survivalist's intimate knowledge of landscape and the ability to adjust on the fly to changing conditions.

Growing a garden is a glorious way of dancing with the forces of nature, with the bees and the flowers and the butterflies, while eating and sniffing and generally digging the scene.

It's a place for whimsy and relaxation, though it's important to be clear about expectations — especially now, when you have a bunch of seed catalogs spread out before you.

One easy rule of thumb is to rule out any plants that need to be planted inside and in pots. I don't care if you have a sunny windowsill. Unless you have a real grow space and the proper gear, growing your own starts is a losing proposition. Unless you really know what you are doing, your tomato seedlings will probably be an embarrassment compared to the greenhouse-grown beauties you can purchase at the farmers market.

I've got a small stable of growers from whom I buy tomato plants, farmers who grow big specimens of interesting varieties that produce delicious, eclectic crops through the summer. These are not the tomatoes with which I make the sauce that fills my freezer. Those tomatoes I'll buy months later, also at the farmers market. Because my garden isn't for filling the freezer. It's a net for catching some fleeting, lovely moments of summer.

While students of chess and wilderness survival look to history for guidance, readers of seed catalogs tend to look forward, focused on what is new. Pineapple strawberries? Sure. Or we seek out things that are less available on the open market, like radicchio.

The only thing I grow in large enough quantities to store and replant is garlic. The rest of the garden, I plant to eat. The blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and



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peas are for the frolicking kids to eat, while the grownups appreciate the basil, radicchio and cucumbers. All of these can be ordered from a seed catalog and planted directly without having to be grown inside. Climbing plants like beans should also be ordered, as well as plants for them to climb on, like sunflowers. As soon as the ground can be worked, plant a handful of peas and beans. When they come up, plant the rest, and your sunflowers among them.

I recommend a large bag of basil, to be seeded in every blank spot in the garden. They can be the exception that gets started indoors, and they are much more forgiving than tomatoes are. Or you can sow the seeds outside around the time you transplant tomatoes. For me, that's about Memorial Day.

Those who take the time to fill their freezers with ready-to-go foods can enjoy meals in winter that practically qualify as fast food. In fact, there was a meal I used to cook in college that made me a minor celebrity on the dorm block that year. I called it PastaPestoPrego, and it leveraged the fact that one needn't choose between pesto and red sauce, as they go great together. On top of that, this recipe manages to push most any button that a 20-year-old guy might possess, delivering noodles, cheese and quantity.

But it wasn't just the satisfaction it delivered that made the meal legendary. It was the sheer speed with which I could prepare it. And if the proverbial pesto and Prego are in place at your place, you can too:

PastaPestoPrego
Big pot of boiling water
Half an onion, minced
Two garlic cloves, pressed, grated or minced
Red sauce
Pesto
Cheese, such as Parmesan or Romano
Ground meat (optional)
When the noodles are done to your liking, drain them and toss with olive oil, and then minced garlic. This, right here, is the most important trick you need to know about pasta: The garlic will cook in the hot noodles and the house will smell amazing. Then stir in the cheese and pesto. Finally, toss in the red sauce. Add more grated cheese, if you can, and proceed to eat until it hurts.

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