

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Deadly animals, big and small

The fatal mauling of a Seattle bicyclist in western Washington serves as a reminder that nature is wild and poses unavoidable threats to human beings when we venture into it — or when nature ventures to us. The friends riding the trails near Snoqualmie did everything right when they spotted the cougar — got off their bikes, made loud noises and scared it off — and yet the man who survived said the animal returned to attack.

It was an unusual death — just the second attributed to a cougar in the state in the last 94 years — but its rarity makes it no less tragic.

But as terrifying an ordeal as it was for those men, and for others who come face-to-face with predators on their home turf, it’s worth remembering that large mammals pose a relatively small threat to humans.

Dogs are the most deadly, according to the World Health Organization, which estimates about 25,000 human deaths a year by canine attack. The vast majority of those are from rabid dogs, though about 30 people die in the U.S. each year from non-rabid dog attacks. That is about the same number of people who have been killed by a cougar in the U.S. in the last century.

Mosquitoes are the deadliest beast in the world, accounting for 725,000 annual human deaths, the majority



Courtesy Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

A cougar in the wild.

from the spread of malaria. In the U.S., bees, wasps and hornets are the the top killers, according to the

CDC, killing 58. Cows (20) are the second deadliest while spiders (7) and venomous snakes and lizards (6) keep

just a high enough body count to give us the willies. Sharks, alligators and bears each kill about one American per year.

We’re the top of the food chain in the forests of Eastern Oregon. Almost without fail, bears, wolves and cougars sprint in the opposite direction whenever they hear or smell a human. Very rarely do they attack, and when they do it’s often because they are ill or injured.

Yet as the West’s wild spaces become filled in with human habitation, collisions between its apex predators will become more common. We must know how to protect ourselves — with bear spray, with respect and space for wild animals, with knowledge about best practices. For large predators, act big and be loud. Don’t run. Play dead if an animal makes physical contact. But if it appears to be trying to kill, then punch at its face, eyes and nose.

But the point we try to make in this editorial is that you are much more likely to be attacked and killed by the neighbor’s dog, or that tick you can’t see, than an apex predator in the Blue Mountains. Be careful, but don’t let fear stop you from experiencing wildness. Odds are that another person in the region won’t be killed by a cougar for many decades.

OTHER VIEWS

What moral heroes are made of

Recently, I’ve been lucky enough to be around a lot of people who I would regard as moral heroes. They spend their lives fighting poverty, caring for the young or the sick, or single-mindedly dedicated to some cause. I’ve been wondering what traits such people tend to have in common.

The first is that they didn’t overthink their decision before choosing to live this way. They didn’t weigh the costs and benefits or wage any internal battle with themselves. As Anne Colby and William Damon write in “Some Do Care,” a book that has organized my thinking on this subject: “We saw an unhesitating will to act, a disavowal of fear and doubt, and a simplicity of moral response. Risks were ignored and consequences went unweighed.”

At some point in their lives, somebody planted an ideal. Somebody set a high example of what a good life looks like, and the person who went on to become a moral hero just assumed that, of course, that’s what one should do.

They tend to have a “This is what I do” mentality. They don’t have a lofty sense of themselves. They don’t have a sense that they are doing anything extraordinary. “What I do is as simple and common as the laughter of a child,” Mother Teresa once said.

They have a weird obliviousness to inferior pleasures. They are not tempted by worldly success because they are not interested in worldly success. They don’t talk much about personal happiness, because they’re not particularly interested in themselves, period.

That’s because, as Colby and Damon argue, their self-identity is fused with a moral ideal.

We see them tirelessly serving the poor or risking their lives for democracy and think they are performing great acts of self-sacrifice, but it doesn’t feel that way to them. It feels like the activation of their own nature. Something needed to be done, so they did it.

Another quality you see is constant goal expansion. Some believe that a person’s character is set in childhood — that after age 18, people don’t change all that much. That’s not how it is with these people. They are to moral life what lifelong learners are to intellectual life.

Some series of problems get presented



DAVID
BROOKS
Comment

to them — say, in the form of a parentless child landing on their doorstep or a new social wrong in their community. They see needs and respond with an instinctive and sometimes reckless series of “yesses” — and later on figure out how they’re going to address them. “Never look down to test the ground before taking the next step,” Dag Hammarskjöld once advised. “Only he who keeps his eye fixed on the far horizon will find the right road.”

You often see such people expanding their ambitions in the face of hardship. Andrei Sakharov was a Soviet scientist who became so concerned with the radioactive fallout from nuclear weapons tests that in 1961 he wrote to Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev dismissed him, portending decades of government intimidation and internal exile. But every time the Soviets punished him, he expanded his activism and his critique.

Often, they have another strong back. There’s usually a team of peers around them sharing core tasks. Great moral leaders like Gandhi and Martin Luther King may get the bulk of attention, but they usually emerge from trusted groups.

People who lead these lives tend to possess an insane level of optimism, a certainty that history does change for the better and that achieving justice is only a matter of time. They remain undaunted even in the face of severe hardship and assume that every wrong is temporary.

Finally, the direction of their lives moves almost invariably from fragmentation to integration. The fragments of their character have become integrated around one single-minded moral cause. They tend to be hedgehogs, not foxes. Their efforts are generally built around healing some rupture in society, reconciling differences, bringing the unlike together.

Some of these moral heroes even seem to sense that no matter how diverse their fields of work are, they’re all somehow part of the same big struggle.

As one anti-poverty activist put it to Colby and Damon: “I also know that I am part of a struggle. I am not the struggle. I am not leading any struggle. I am there. And I have been there for a long time, and I’m going to be there for the rest of my life. So I have no unrealistic expectations. Therefore, I am not going to get fatigued.”

David Brooks, New York Times



YOUR VIEWS

Gun lovers so afraid they put everyone else at risk

I am so tired of hearing all the NRA whiners terrified of losing their right to own a little stockpile of weapons because they fear their own government they say they’re protecting will take over their country and kill their families.

They fear people from across the border will someday take over their country and they need to be prepared to defend their families. They need to be prepared to fight the al-Qaeda that are coming into their country and mass-murdering their people.

They are so afraid of their own shadows they put everyone else’s lives to the side. It’s all about protecting the family.

Their fears are based on unforeseen outcome of their future. That is their world. That is their mental illness to own.

What is sad is when a parent or any citizen chooses not to first make sure that that “right” also includes the rights of minors in their care. Children also have the right to live in safe homes where parents don’t just protect them with weapons but care enough to protect them from access to them.

No matter how old, if they still reside in your home, the parent or guardian is still legally responsible for their health, care and welfare. Period.

Have weapons? So what. Have them accessible to kids? Have them loaded?

Have ammo with the weapons? Have them stashed in your shed or garage locked up, yet minors know where the keys are “in case of emergency?” Keep a loaded gun in your bedroom? What is responsible about this?

Suggestions: We all have to have or want insurance or permits.

At least liability insurance. House insurance, healthcare insurance, renters insurance, insurance to cover replacements of valuables in case of fire or theft, vehicle insurance per vehicle, get airline insurance or airline ticket insurance, dental insurance, optical insurance, etc.

You want immigrants here legally? We need passports, driver permits, state identification cards, driver’s license, permits to build, sell, get married, divorce, give birth, die, get buried, register to vote.

We need responsible gun owners to put the life of a child above all else. To be responsible and pass a law that requires all weapons owned be registered, liability insurance coverage based on number of weapons owned, mandatory reporting of weapons stolen to the police, and at any time a minor has access to a weapon you own and something happens when the child has the weapon, you, the guardian, will be held legally responsible for all damages, injuries and deaths that result. Period.

Bernie Sanderson
Hermiston

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