

You can get anywhere from here

A Sense of Place. That's the theme of next week's BMCC Arts and Culture Festival, a week of music, writing, film, and community discussion. It's also the theme of Yamhill County's Terroir Arts and Culture Festival in McMinnville the following weekend. In fact, a sense of place is what has put Northwest literature on the map for readers everywhere.

So I wasn't surprised to notice in the Spring issue of "Windfall: A Journal of Poetry of Place" that nine of the contributors have read at Pendleton Center for the Arts First Draft Writers' Series. Or are about to read: Vince Wixon will be here on Thursday. We pay pretty close attention to place in Umatilla County. How could we not, living where we do?

This year BMCC has invited me to be the festival's artist-in-residence. My novel "All Coyote's Children" is set on the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and from the time I published my first book, "Above the Clearwater: Living on Stolen Land," place has been an essential part of my writing. I'll be giving readings and hoping for the kind of lively Q and A sessions we have at First Draft. And on Thursday at noon I'll be joining Rich Wandschneider and Pamela Reese to think out loud about home, about making a home in this place.

I'm especially looking forward to this discussion because I am searching for

answers. This place we love, this incredible Northwest — in fact, this entire continent and the South American continent as well — was already "home" to many, many people when my ancestors arrived. And my ancestors' relationship to place — conquest, control — led to a whole lot of suffering for those people.

I thought I knew quite a lot about that suffering. Sand Creek, the Trail(s) of Tears. Boarding schools. "Kill the Indian and save the man." Allotment Acts. Termination. But in the community room at Pendleton Public Library, while doing background research for "All Coyote's Children," I was stunned to find these words, written by Oregon's first historian, Herbert Howe Bancroft: "The quick extermination of the aborigines may be regarded as a blessing both to the red race and to the white."

How do I — how do any of us — live with that?

We have begun, at last, to try. To make amends. But is issuing an official if half-hearted government apology, or starting public events with an oral land acknowledgment and supporting the return of as much homeland as possible to Native peoples — is that enough?

I'm here, and Europe can't take me back. I'd have to split myself into too many pieces. And like you, I love this sage-steppe land, the shadows of the Blues.

Who wouldn't love the river of my childhood home, the Clearwater? The most beautiful river in the world, I think, every time I drive along that canyon. Or the Willamette country, where I was privileged to live for over a decade. The high desert east and south of us, the stunning shapes and shades of the Palouse.

But I know what happened in these places. So how can I live here with integrity? How can I be "home"?

Robin Wall Kimmerer, in her book "Braiding Sweetgrass," has one suggestion. If our ancestors came as immigrants to this continent, she says, we can never become indigenous. "No amount of time or caring changes history or substitutes with soul-deep fusion with the land." But like contemporary immigrants, we can become "naturalized." Rather than seeing the earth primarily as a resource to exploit, we can learn to have a deeper — and reciprocal — relationship with the plants and animals and peoples of this place. We can learn what they have to teach us and accept our responsibilities to them as well as the gifts they give us.

Impossibly idealistic? Maybe. But my Umatilla, Cayuse, and Walla Walla neighbors don't call such ideas pie in the sky. They call it First Foods. If we're lucky we get invited to the huckleberry feast.

I'm still searching for my own way for-



BETTE HUSTED
FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE

ward. But I hope the title of this column — words I heard spoken in Harney County, in the center of all that space — will someday prove true. "You can get anywhere from here."

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



OTHER VIEWS

The politics of our disgrace at the border

Suppose one night there is a knock on your door. You open it to find 100 bedraggled families shivering in your yard — exhausted, filthy, terrified. The first cry of your heart would be to take them in, but you'd know there were too many.

But you'd still do something. You'd rally your neighbors and the local authorities and put some system in place — some way to provide immediate care, figure out who these people were and how, within your means, you could lift them up.

And this is precisely what the U.S. has failed to do in handling the refugees who are flooding across the southern border. There is nothing remotely like an adequate system in place to handle the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing violence in Central America or seeking economic opportunity. And there is no prospect of a plan being put in place from either Republicans or Democrats.

And in that way the border crisis is paradigmatic of our politics right now. Both parties are content to adopt abstract ideological postures. Neither is interested in creating a functioning system that balances tradeoffs and actually works. In the age of Trump, national politics is showbiz — self-righteous performance art to make the base feel good about itself.

The Trump show is all about toughness and cruelty. The administration adopted a zero-tolerance policy that was supposed to deter potential immigrants. It failed miserably. Roughly 103,000 unauthorized immigrants reached the

U.S.-Mexico border in March, twice as many as in March 2018.

Aside from baring his fangs, Trump is uninterested in processing the extra refugees. The facilities are overwhelmed. Over 800,000 people have their cases pending. New asylum-seekers are held for a couple of weeks, dumped out on the streets, and most will wait until 2021 to get their formal hearings. My colleagues Michael Shear, Miriam Jordan and Manny Fernandez cite the words officials are using to describe the situation: "operational emergency," "systemwide meltdown," "the system is on fire."

The field is wide open for the Democrats to come forth with a decent plan. But on many issues the 2020 Democrats aren't really having a primary campaign; they're having a purity test. The candidates are not sure if they can deviate from wherever the social media warriors have defined the leftward edge. So the Democratic show consists of indignant generalities intended to sound radical while changing nothing.

Many Democrats in Congress are denying there even is a crisis on the border. The only Democratic candidate with an immigration plan so far is Julián Castro, who wants to repeal a 1929 provi-



DAVID BROOKS
COMMENT

THE U.S. CANNOT TAKE IN EVERYBODY WHO WANTS TO COME. SO THE FIRST TASK IS TO SET PRIORITIES.

sion that made illegal entry a federal crime. Others gesture toward the open border crowd with policies like eliminating ICE. This is Trumpian extremism reversed.

Immigration is one of those issues on which the extreme positions are wrong, because the correct answer means balancing competing goods.

On the one hand, these people are our neighbors. Many of them come to us with harrowing stories of husbands murdered, daughters raped, mass extortion. It's our obligation and joy to reach out to them with a hand of solidarity. It's barbarism to send them back to lawlessness.

On the other hand, many who are coming across seeking asylum do not qualify for it. When they get their hearings, only 20 percent win the right to stay in the United States because they'd face persecution in their home countries. Many come for traditional economic reasons. The murder rate in El Salvador has fallen by half since 2015, while the number of asylum-seekers has skyrocketed.

The U.S. cannot take in everybody who wants to come. So the first task is to set priorities. The victims of violence and persecution get top priority, then those being systemically denied their

basic rights because their country has become a failed state, then those seeking economic betterment.

Then you create a system to implement those priorities. Over the short term do the things any practical mayor would do: build new detention centers at the border; expand the capacities at the ports of entry; expand the number of judge teams, to speed through the backlog; create an orderly release procedure coordinated with humanitarian agencies; increase the number of counselors so refugees can navigate the system; vet children in their home countries for refugee status so they don't have to make a fruitless trip.

Over the long term, you help build better police and justice systems in the home countries. You cooperate with Mexico to jointly tackle this challenge we face together. You might shift to a more skills-based immigration system while increasing the number of refugees we take in each year.

Designing a practical response that wins widespread support is, in theory, not hard. But it requires starting with a certain question: What can we do to help them? Much of today's politics starts from a different question: What posture can I adopt that will reflect well on me? What can I say to prove I'm manly or woke?

This is what happens when the politics of practical action get replaced by the politics of performative narcissism.

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Simplify tax day for Americans

The New York Times

Congress has landed on one of those rare ideas that commands support from both Democrats and Republicans. Unfortunately, it's a bad one.

On Tuesday, the House approved legislation misleadingly titled the Taxpayer First Act that includes a provision prohibiting the Internal Revenue Service from developing a free online system that most American households could use to file their taxes. The Senate is considering a similar piece of bipartisan legislation.

This makes no sense. Congress should be making it easier for Americans to file their taxes. Instead of barring the I.R.S.

from making April a little less miserable, why isn't Congress requiring the I.R.S. to create a free tax filing website?

Better yet, the United States could emulate the roughly three dozen countries, including Chile, Japan and Britain, where most taxpayers do not need to fill out tax returns. In some of those countries, the accuracy of tax withholding is sufficient to obviate the annual filing process. In others, the government sends out completed forms to most taxpayers. In Estonia, filing taxes can be done in less than three minutes.

The federal government collects enough information about most American households to mail out a completed tax form that people would simply need

to verify, sign and return. President Ronald Reagan proposed a version of just such a system. In 1998, Congress passed a law instructing the I.R.S. to develop such a system by 2008. President Barack Obama endorsed the concept during the 2008 presidential campaign. It still hasn't happened.

The explanation is sad but not surprising. The most vocal opponent of simplicity is Intuit, the maker of TurboTax, which has spent millions of dollars lobbying against efforts to reduce demand for its services. The company draws support from conservatives worried that making it easier to file taxes would make it easier to raise taxes.

Intuit and its allies, including pro-

ponents of the legislation, say that it's cheaper and better for the government to let private companies run the system. But companies have little incentive to advertise the availability of free filing or to make the system easy to use. Indeed, they have every reason to steer people away from the free products. That is how they make money.

As a result, the government is saving taxpayer money at the expense of those taxpayers.

Members of Congress pay lip service to ideas like filing taxes on a postcard, but they continue to perpetuate the current system of mass April immiseration by preventing the most obvious and effective way to simplify tax collection.