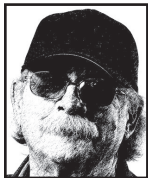


My favorite job: ‘Big Cowboy’



J.D. SMITH

FROM THE HEADWATERS OF DRY CREEK

I worked as a hay waddy at the age of 14. It would take way more words than my monthly allotment here to discuss all the work I’ve done since. As my railroading dad used to put it, I bounced around like a BB in a boxcar, but I’ve been lucky.

The following tale illustrates how lucky I was.

It was a Thursday in late October. Penny-whistle Rudy and I were busking a block off Fisherman’s Wharf, San Francisco, fresh from herding hamburger on the hoof in Idaho, fleeing the snow. He was an accomplished tootler, who played Irish tunes and kept an inventory of cheap tin whistles that admirers could purchase. My hat was our cash register. We had slept the previous night in the red dirt of Napa Valley, casualties of too many wine tastings. I was hungry, pulled five bucks from our earnings and went to find a late afternoon lunch.

Ten power poles from our corner I found a poster advertising the First Annual Hooker’s Ball, to be held in a couple of days at Long-

shoremen’s Hall, \$30 a ticket, sponsored by COYOTE, (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), an organization working to decriminalize sex work in California, with a phone number. The Pointer Sisters were to headline. I didn’t have \$30 to spare.

When I brought the baguette, cheese and beer, I told Rudy about the event. He reverted to his Utah upbringing and said that he wanted nothing to do with a bunch of whores. We ate lunch and split the day’s take. Last I saw of him he was in his van, headed toward Provo. I found a pay phone.

Margo St. James, founder of COYOTE, answered the call. I explained to her that I was fresh from the Salmon River Mountains, could not afford a ticket to the ball, but I was willing to work. She told me to be at the hall at noon on Saturday and to ask for Lottie Dah. I walked to the ferry terminal and slept the next two nights on the couch of a pal in Sausalito.

The Longshoremen’s Hall resembles a high school gym. Lottie was dressed in sweats and Margo had told her to expect me. I asked what she wanted me to do. She said that the San Francisco Fire Department was arriving in five minutes to hang a screen for the ball’s light show, but that the screen was coming in half an hour. My job was to stall the fire department for 25 minutes.

The hook and ladder truck and captain’s car were right on time. I strolled slowly out to meet the captain, figuring that every second I could waste would help. He was in full dress mode, epaulets, badges, everything neatly creased and scary. As I was winding up to pitch the truth at him, I heard a hissing noise coming from the front of the truck and saw, fully imbedded in the driver’s side front tire, a big shiny square-headed tar paper nail.

When I pointed it out to him, the captain said a few things not appropriate to recount in a family newspaper, then radioed for the maintenance guys to come and change the tire. Ten minutes later the screen arrived and three union firefighters hung it on the stage while they waited for the tire repair. A sloppy roofer helped me earn my ticket to the First Annual Hooker’s Ball.

I met Margo at the ball. She wore a pheasant feather mask and evening gown. I wore a fresh pair of Wranglers, light blue snap shirt, White’s packer boots, and my tan Resistol with the Roy Rogers crease. While we shook hands she asked if I wanted a little more work, then peeled off three \$20s from a roll and pointed across the hall to a woman reading a book. “That is Dorothy, my mother. Keep her entertained for the evening.”

The ball contained everything strange and kinky about San Francisco. There were three

cross-dressing Raggedy Anns, a functionally naked Tin Man in silver, plenty of beautiful women in and out of fairy gowns, and a person of indeterminate gender painted and garbed exactly like the Boston Terrier he/she/they kept on a leash. The Pointer Sisters were powerful and wonderful. Dorothy and I were the least outrageous humans there, both of us wallflowers, but we did manage to dance a couple of tunes.

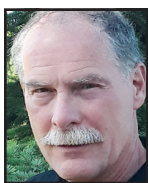
At midnight, Margo found us, handed me a paper sack and asked if I had a car. I told her I had a stock truck. She said “Perfect. Take mom over the bridge to an apartment in Sausalito.” I asked what was in the bag. She smiled a coyote grin and said, “\$60,000. Put it on the kitchen table.” Dorothy and I became buddies that night. I still wear her name in ink on my left shoulder. I slept on their couch.

Margo cooked breakfast, thanked me for taking care of her mom, and said if I ever needed work to look her up. That was the beginning of a three-year stint as her “Big Cowboy,” a part-time gig that was a combo between bodyguard and pack horse. She was the best boss I ever had and the strongest person I have ever known.

She died in January. You can Google her.

J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.

So much more than a pump



JOHN WINTERS

HEALTH CARE ESSENTIALS

The heart is conventionally described as an efficient pump, but recent discoveries show it’s oh, so much more than that.

What the heart does is really quite impressive. The average heart beats about 100,000 times a day, pumping 2,000 gallons of blood throughout our bodies. Over a lifetime, it will beat over three billion times and could fill 200 train tanker cars with blood. The energy used by the heart in a single day would push a truck 20 miles down the road. Over a lifetime, it could get that truck to the moon and back. And, as we will see, it does much more than this.

The heart is comprised of specialized muscle fibers uniquely designed for its critical task. The heart pushes blood through 60,000 miles of blood vessels, faithfully nonstop 24/7 without time off. It will beat your entire lifetime. The electro-magnetic field it generates is

present throughout the body and is measured by an electrocardiogram (ECG) machine. This field is 60 times more powerful than what the brain puts out and can be measured anywhere on the body, and even several feet outside the body.

Problems with the heart muscle and blood circulation remain the No. 1 killer worldwide. Standard conventional treatments endeavor to repair a section of cardiac artery with bypass surgery, stents or angioplasty. Drugs are used to suppress blood cholesterol levels and blood pressure.

The long list of treatments used to treat the various cardiovascular diseases may have short-term lifesaving effects, but fail to address the underlying causes of the problem. Diseases aren’t caused by a deficiency of drugs or surgery, but these interventions may treat symptoms effectively for some time. The root cause of illness is usually a complicated mix of what you were born with and what you have done with it.

Genetics, daily habits and thoughts all play important roles. Recent scientific inquiry has firmly established the heart as a “sensory organ” and a sophisticated information processing center. The heart has a complex

nervous system that learns, remembers and makes decisions. In fact, researchers are finding the heart sends more information to the brain than the brain sends to the heart! Often, the heart senses and reacts to an event before the brain, and sometimes before the event even occurs! You could call this heart-to-brain-to-body flow of information “intuition” or “gut feeling.”

Scientists at the HeartMath Institute have researched this field since 1991. They find through many studies that a united, coherent mind, body and emotions lead to improved health. It’s like comparing a common flashlight to a laser beam; the laser beam is coherent, organized light, unlike the scattered incoherent beam from a flashlight. Coherence allows all body systems to work together more powerfully and efficiently. While in a coherent state, you are more creative, energetic, relaxed, resilient, balanced and stable.

Blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, hormones and other measures of health are improved. You function better, are healthier and have more fun! Thoughts of appreciation, gratitude and harmony with yourself and with others were found the most effective ways to attain this state. Fear, anxiety, anger and impa-

tiency shatter this state. Our biology works to maintain inner balance, stability and harmony.

Balance allows all systems to run at peak efficiency. Imbalances create more work for the body to overcome, although small imbalances can make you stronger. Learning a new skill or exercising are ways to challenge yourself so you will bounce back smarter, stronger and more resilient. The body rebounds by building new neural pathways and stronger muscles so you are more at ease and in control of yourself.

And what about stress, you may well ask? Well, stress is a bit of a conundrum. A little stress stimulates growth and makes you stronger, which is great. But too much stress, especially chronic stress, will run you down, which leads to disease. When you tune into the energy of your heart, it can help you tell the difference between what strengthens or weakens you.

This February let’s give some extra attention to the amazing heart — it is so much more than a pump.

John Winters is a naturopathic physician, who recently retired after operating a practice in La Grande since 1992.

Migrant farm workers and environmental racism in Oregon



ANIA TY

OTHER VIEWS

As climate change increases Oregon’s temperature, low-income Black, Indigenous and people of color communities will be disproportionately burdened by the dangerous impacts of heat waves, drought and wildfires. Although urban and rural communities alike will suffer from the consequences of these phenomena, their experiences will be unique.

In major cities, heat islands will create a deadly temperature disparity of more than 10 degrees between low-income communities of color and wealthier white neighborhoods. In farmlands — which make up over 29% of the state population and occupy 86% of its land mass — acute and chronic conditions will increase in their frequency and severity among the farmworkers cultivating Oregon’s thriving farms.

Migrant workers are one of the only

groups of people more consistent than our daily sunrise and sunset, with many of them beginning and ending brutal work days in sync with the sun’s cycle. These long days spent outdoors have led to nearly one-third of Oregon’s workers experiencing two or more symptoms caused by heat-related illness: this includes skin rash, painful muscle cramps and spasms, dizziness, fainting, headache, heavy sweating, fatigue, nausea and vomiting, and confusion.

In extreme cases, this can even lead to death; in the past decade, “more than 350 workers nationwide have died from heat-related illness,” according to Kaiser Health News. This is likely due to a combination of lacking key resources (40% had no access to cooling measures at work), education (only 21% of workers were aware of heat-related illnesses and mitigation strategies), and effective, pro-worker labor policies.

Currently, there are no sweeping federal labor laws to eliminate or mitigate the effects of extreme heat in the workplace, leaving this enormous responsibility for state and local governments to tackle. Few states have labor policies addressing the dangers of heat-related illnesses; California

and Washington’s policies protect outdoor laborers while Minnesota’s only protects indoor laborers.

In the city of Waco, Texas, they responded to this by training employees on prevention strategies, screening workers for diseases that would increase their risk of heat-related illness, providing more breaks, supplying adequate water supplies, and adjusting people’s order of tasks. A decade later, the number of “heat-related illnesses had essentially been cut to zero and median worker compensation costs were cut in half” according to Kaiser Health News. The necessity of strong, federal labor laws will only become more apparent as new disasters — like wildfires — continue to devastate migrant worker populations.

Migrant farmworkers are at increased risk of developing asthma, due to the high amounts of “organic and inorganic dusts, particulate matter, microbial agents, gases, volatile organic compounds, cleaning agents, fertilizers and feed additives” they are constantly exposed to, according to an article in the Journal of Agromedicine. Rates of work-related asthma and other lung conditions will only increase as wildfires caused

by climate change continue to ravage the state.

During 2020, several wildfires in Oregon, Washington and California painted the sky Armageddon orange and filled the air with enormous clouds of smoke, plunging the state’s air quality to all-time lows. Despite these apocalyptic-like conditions, migrant farmworkers were forced to persevere. Though some employers discouraged their employees from working, many families could not afford unpaid time off. Additionally, lack of internet access and translation resources prevented many laborers from accessing critical information posted online.

Community activists at Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste and other organizations allied with Oregon Climate Action Plan’s Health Policy Table have been working to reframe environmental racism as a public health crisis. With consistent exposure to extreme heat, toxins, pollutants, and natural disasters, the time to act and ensure the health and safety of migrant workers is now.

Ania Ty is a student at Oregon State University.

National forests, BLM lands should be off-limits to logging



GEORGE WUERTHNER

OTHER VIEWS

The Biden administration supports protecting 30% of U.S. lands by 2030, or what is termed the “30-by-30 proposal.” One of the best ways to meet those 30-by-30 goals would be to put all national forests and BLM lands off-limits to logging.

Not only does this help to move the country closer to the 30-by-30 goals, but it would go a long way toward sequestering carbon as well.

Our public forests currently hold about seven times the current annual national carbon emissions and U.S. forests sequester about 12% of the country’s carbon emissions.

If we stopped logging and thinning our federal forests, we could sequester even more carbon.

However, the U.S. Forest Service, the timber industry and co-opted conservation

groups continue to support thinning the forest in the name of precluding large wildfires.

Unfortunately, advocates of thinning mislead Americans on the limited effectiveness of thinning in precluding large blazes. Plus, logging contributes more carbon to the atmosphere that exacerbates fire weather.

The problem with the “thinning will limit large fires” myth is that it ignores the influence of extreme fire weather. Thinning might, in some instances, slow or stop blazes burning under low to moderate fire conditions, but not under extreme fire weather. Under less than extreme weather, most fires are easily suppressed or even self-extinguish if we leave them alone.

All large fires are driven by extreme weather. And these are the fires that the agency, politicians and others seek to stop, but under such conditions, the scientific consensus is that nothing can stop a blaze. Wind-driven fires pass over, around, and through thinned forests and prescribed burning sites.

Despite being some of the heaviest logged and thinned forests in Oregon, fires burn-

ing under extreme fire weather conditions charred hundreds of thousands of acres of the Western Cascades.

Even if logging/thinning worked to slow a blaze’s advance, there is an extremely low likelihood (less than 1%) that any treated forests will be exposed to fire. So most thinning projects remove carbon, but they do nothing to reduce large blazes.

As one study concluded: “The amount of carbon removed to change fire behavior is often far larger than that saved by changing fire behavior, and more area has to be harvested than will ultimately burn over the period of effectiveness of the thinning treatment.”

Another researcher suggests: “Reducing the fraction by which C is lost in a wildfire requires the removal of a much greater amount of C, since most of the C stored in forest biomass (stem wood, branches, coarse woody debris) remains unconsumed even by high-severity wildfires.”

A common misconception is that wildfires release a lot of carbon. Burning does release some carbon, but the majority of the

carbon in the forest remains on-site even after a severe fire. The snags left after a blaze contain much of the carbon found in a forest, while charcoal that is retained in the soil stores even more carbon.

By contrast, logging releases a tremendous amount of carbon. The biggest source of greenhouse gases in Oregon is logging, which accounts for 35% of the state’s emissions.

Plus, the carbon lost during thinning/logging takes decades to centuries to re-sequester.

The highest value of our public forests is their function as carbon reserves. Prohibiting logging would not only help sequester more carbon. In addition, putting all federal lands in carbon reserves would provide numerous other benefits, such as watershed protection, protection of wildlife habitat, preserving the ecological function of insect, wildfire, and drought that creates healthy forest ecosystems.

George Wuerthner is an ecologist who specializes in fire ecology and livestock issues.