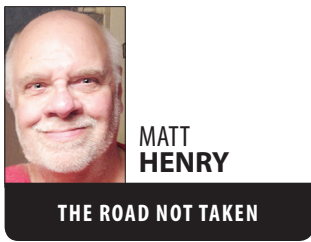


Staying afloat in an ocean of grief



When I was a child, I once came very close to drowning by trying to capture a turtle by the side of a lake that was a little too deep for me. I was 4 and did not yet know how to swim.

I waded into the water after the turtle, the bottom quickly dropped away and I got my first taste of panic. I was in an isolated cove, no one was around and I was also getting my first taste of lake water. The nastiness of it made me almost vomit while drowning; impending 4-year-old death just doesn't get any nastier, I can assure you.

Screaming, flailing away at the water pulling me down, my stomach filling up with the lake, slowly losing energy, my terror now brazen and cold as I pulled myself up to the surface for the last time, my eye spied something truly bizarre: two young boys (in Boy Scout uniforms, no less!) were in a rowboat rowing madly toward me. Under water I saw two arms reach down, grab me under the armpits and haul me into the boat. They took me back to the shore, I got out, wandered back to my parent's cottage puking up water and never stopped crying. My dad walked me back down to the cove to thank the boys for saving my life, but there was nothing there. No boys

and no boat. The two scouts vanished back into the shrouds of mystery with their boat from which they'd arrived.

I am drowning once more. This time, it's not horrid lake water coming down my lungs but tear water pouring from my eyes. My best friend, my wife Amy, is now on hospice, disappearing from the world slowly and horribly from early-onset Alzheimer's disease. To be truthful, I find myself suffering from chronic acute grief that just doesn't let up or give an inch.

Writing this column is a sheer act of will, as is everything I do these days. The sadness is grinding and feels untouchable. After being married to an angel for 42 years, I'm so God-damned lonely now. I chase after anything that I may catch to keep me wanting to stay alive, all with varying degrees of efficacy. And as I drown in joylessness and soul yuck, suddenly out of the corner of my eye here comes my good friend, Dr. Jill Medicine Woman, accompanied by a little pooch standing about 8 inches at the shoulder named Rascal.

Being owned by a cat, I am unused to what comes next. Imagine a Shitzu-Pomeranian mix with a bad underbite, bling glued to his fur, with a grin that busts his already bustable face from ear to ear. He sees me, Jill drops his leash, he comes pounding down the sidewalk toward me and proceeds to happily wash my face of tear salt. Rascal knows nothing of my wife or Alzheimer's, so he spares me the pain of asking after her or "how

I'm doing." He just lives in that moment, the moment of sharing love.

And he's not alone. Often accompanying Jill are two 6-year old twins, kids that are lucky enough to have good parents and a stable home. Like the dog, they are sheer, unadulterated joy at its best and they shower me with that, as does Rascal. Emma and Amos, through their pure, honest joy, help keep me alive, as does Jill and her erstwhile furry crony.

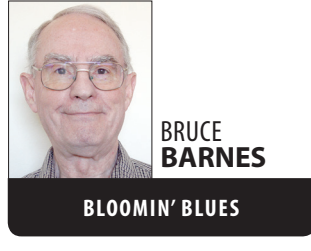
And a block away are Elise and Bradleigh, two sweet precocious girls who, like Emma and Amos, make me feel like it actually matters that I'm alive and in their lives. With them appears a full-grown gray male poodle named most appropriately "Knuckles," who cuddles right up and keeps me afloat. Then there's Nina, Lucy, Ruby, Cadi, Max and Maggie — all four-leggeds. I owe my life to all of them.

God sends me people and messages to help me stay in the ring. My close friends are doing their best to keep me up and steady for the next round of grief blows and I remain forever thankful.

Composer Jeff Lynne writes, "Without the friends and lovers you could never go on living." So, so true. Add kids and dogs to friends and lovers and you get the idea.

The Rev. Dr. Matt Henry is a retired American Baptist/United Methodist pastor, who pastored the Pendleton First United Church and now joyfully makes "hippie food" for the houseless at the Warming Station.

Spreading phlox a forest slope standby



Common name: Spreading phlox
Scientific name: *Phlox diffusa*

This plant is one of 11 phlox species in northeastern Oregon, most of which would be in bloom by this time in a "normal" year in the Blues. It forms spreading, tangled mats up to four inches tall on open slopes in the forest.

The flowers are single at the stem tips, each with five rounded, pink to pale blue or white petals. As with other phlox species, the flower has each petal attached to a central, somewhat hidden tube. For this species the tube is almost twice as long as the petals. The leaves are narrowly linear, with nearly spine-like tips.

Phlox *diffusa* grows from Vancouver Island to the Cascades, and in the Cascades to California, then east to the Blues and northern Idaho.

Many species of Phlox were widely used by northwest tribes for a number of purposes. However, Phlox



Bruce Barnes/Contributed Photo
Spreading phlox, *Phlox diffusa*.

diffusa is not one of those listed.

Bruce Barnes directs Flora ID, producing plant ID software, found at <http://flora-id.org>. Reach him at flora.id@wtechlink.us.

COMMUNITY BRIEFING

Scholarships awarded to Pendleton women

PENDLETON — Pendleton PEO Chapter EM is pleased to announce the award of PEO sisterhood scholarships for 2021-22 to Katelyn Kelm, Aimee Gunter, Virginia Kerns and Cristal Ponce-Palomera.

Kelm, an environmental studies major at the University of Oregon, was awarded a \$2,000 Marguerite Scholarship.

Gunter was awarded a \$3,400 scholarship, funded by the Lois New McElveny Fund. She is majoring in elementary education at Eastern Oregon University.

Kerns, studying occupational therapy at Pacific University, was awarded a \$1,250 scholarship.

Spanish major Ponce-

Palomera was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to continue at EOU.

Riverside graduate accepted to Stanford

BOARDMAN — Jose Ruiz-Nino, Class of 2021 valedictorian at Riverside Jr./Sr. High, was recently accepted to Stanord University, with a full academic scholarship

David Norton, Riverside principal, said Ruiz-Nino is a student who has been focused and driven to reach his goals, especially the goal to become the first person in his family to attend college.

While at Riverside, Ruiz-Nino participated in band, baseball and FBLA, was an ASB Officer and was a member of the National

Honor Society. Ruiz-Nino pushed himself academically, and graduated with 57 college credits.



Ruiz-Nuno Ruiz-Nino said, "I wouldn't be in this position, honestly, if it wasn't for the teachers and staff in Boardman. All the way from elementary school to now, all of them have pushed me to excel academically and they were always there to support me."

Principal Norton said he is proud of Ruiz-Nino and what he represents. "Jose ... has spent countless hours volunteering in our community, and he brightens the room with his personality. Jose will be missed at Riverside, and we wish him the best of luck in his future."

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