

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Taking the time to reflect this holiday

This week will mark the final countdown to Christmas, and while there is plenty to be worried about we hope residents of our great part of the state take the opportunity to reflect and enjoy their families and celebrate.

Just a quick glance at the news cycle shows we face — as a nation and therefore as individuals — a host of challenges.

Inflation is on the rise. A new variant of the COVID-19 virus is on the horizon, considered to be even more contagious than any other form of the infection.

These are just two simmering and worrying issues that face us all. Both are largely out of our control as individuals.

We also cannot forget all of those among us who will not be able to enjoy the type of Christmas many of us consider to be routine. Those who are homeless or struggling just to pay bills won't be able to fully participate in one of the biggest and most significant holidays of the year.

We can't ignore those who are struggling and must reaffirm our dedication to help them in the coming months. Christmas is a time that usually puts a spotlight on those who are less fortunate, but, as soon as the holiday passes, that light shifts.

This coming year we cannot allow that to happen and instead must continue to focus on helping those who need a hand up.

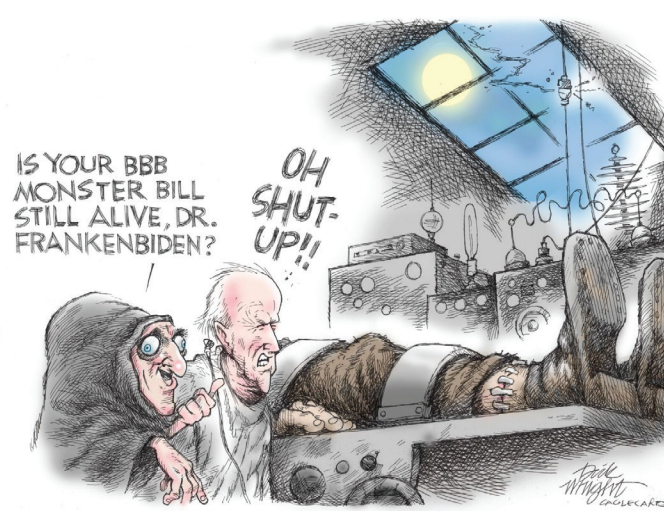
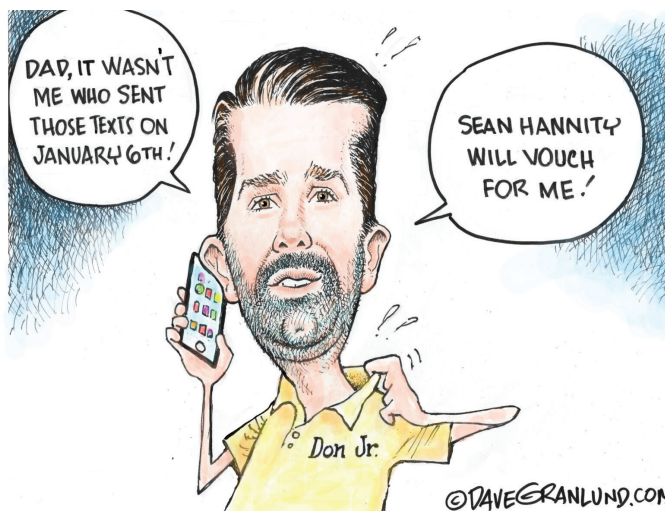
Yet, overall, of the challenges we face, there is the underlying aspect of our inherent resolve as a culture to overcome challenges. The people of Eastern Oregon are renowned for our ability to face and overcome challenges.

There is indeed much to be worried about, but as the Christmas holiday nears, we should remember that our region still is vibrant, still producing great people who do great things on a regular basis.

We remain a strong group, ready to take on problems and solve them. We don't buckle under unfortunate circumstances but find ways to win.

Unemployment is down across the region. There are multiple organizations that are in place to help those who are less fortunate. The collective sense of volunteer and to help remains strong.

The future presents a host of obstacles, but this week, and especially on Christmas Day, we hope everyone remembers all that is good about our region. Christmas allows us to take a collective deep breath and to reflect. Let's do that.



Transmuting moments of vulnerability into magic



ALEX HOBBS
PASTURES OF PLENTY

I've been thinking recently about vulnerability. What it looks like, feels like, entails.

If vulnerability is the multiplier, what do we multiply it with, what is the product, the outcome of this action? Courage adjacent, vulnerability asks to shed light on the innermost workings of our hearts and mind and past. The process then is honesty and bravery in spite of the nagging, intrusive thoughts.

It's a realignment, for those of us who have fought against and lost many times over to the self-preservation instinct which tells us to harden ourselves against disappointment.

There is no guaranteed upshot. Only ripples. Ever-expanding. A seed buried in the cold hard earth.

In 2009, I was 19. A sophomore English major whose identity was fully wrapped up in the brick-clad buildings of academia. Of American literature anthologies and annotations, of my column in the university newspaper, in booze-laden conversations, only undergraduates have once they become equipped with the multisyllabic language of romanticism and philosophy.

Before then, existing on a college campus seemed beyond contemplation. Unobtainable. Freshman year had sputtered to a close, but my sophomore year held vast potential. A fog had lifted

and in its stead, the sun, lionhearted and lemony, blossomed.

But in October of that year four incontrovertible lines, like Roman legions conquering Gaul, spread across the planes of two pregnancy tests. I capped the tests and placed them gently in my pocket. It was raining that night and would continue to rain for some time.

That moment has been with me on repeat since its occurrence. Echoing in perpetuity. A constant companion. The clarity with which I instantly understood my path still befuddles me to this day. My hand had been forced and I would deal with the repercussions as they came, but at that moment I knew what I would do despite the control which would soon be wrested from me.

I would keep my son because I could see him with such clarity that it seemed almost preternatural. Marrying this sense of fate with grief is a strange experience. Simultaneous blooming and wilting. Stranger still is purposefully walking forward with the understanding that a giant precipice nears, that soon you will be unable to halt the momentum, and that over the edge is all that lies ahead.

That fall, I moved back home to Eastern Oregon where I waited for my son to be born into the spring. I met him earthside in May 2010. He was round and perfect and had long strands of dark hair (those would later be spun to gold). I can still feel his cheeks squish beneath my lips like a mud-luscious puddle.

Accompanying me at this moment, however, was grief. Unimaginable, all-consuming, flailing, despairing grief. It shrouded everything it touched with a

blackness so complete that when I look back on that day nearly 12 years later, I feel heartbroken for that girl and her baby — alone in a sterile room, save the doctor and nurse. Moving forward despite the ground opening up and swallowing her whole. The breaking of the world and torrential rains — too much to bear now.

That rain, however, nourished the seedlings left behind by the rotten fruit — the grief, the sadness. I didn't understand the anatomy of a blossom then. Soon those seedlings would germinate and take root. They would twist and embrace and stretch and fill the hollow ground with hope and with gratitude. With love.

Why share this story?

We are complicated creatures capable of holding simultaneous conflicting beliefs, emotions, wants, and needs. Accepting suffering as a gift is a radical act of vulnerability. So is arriving at the understanding that those complicated moments will irrevocably change us. Moments in time that you cannot undo, words that cannot be unsaid, emotions that can no longer be neglected. Stepping into that reality is terrifying but the alternative is scarier — a denial of self. I cannot change the past no more than an alchemist could translate mercury into gold. But I can transmute moments of vulnerability into magic.

We can plant the seeds and hope the fruit that they bear is sweet.

Alex Hobbs is a former educator turned full-time homeschooling mom. She has a degree in political science from Oregon State University.

YOUR VIEWS

Eight wolf poisonings an attack on all wildlife

The loss of eight Eastern Oregon wolves to poisoning over the last year is an assault on all things living. It represents an indiscriminate attack on all our wildlife. All wildlife, avian and mammalian, carnivores and scavengers, are put at risk by these selfish acts.

These animals represent important pieces of a healthy, naturally-functioning ecosystem. Their short sighted and illegal extermination threatens the balance and function of that ecosystem.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation supports a balanced approach to wolf recovery

and carnivore management. Health, human safety and protection of our local economies is an important part of that balance, as is the maintenance of healthy big-game populations through a transparent, thoughtful and professional management approach. The vilification of wildlife species and these vigilante attacks undermines this management approach.

Wolves and other carnivores serve an important role in maintenance of the health and vitality of our big game populations, as well as the many small carnivores and scavengers that make up our collective wildlife heritage. In addition to playing a role in ecology, predators have long been respected in tribal culture. They are prominent in our stories, coyote being the most famous,

but wolves and others play a part in some of those stories handed down for many generations to provide teachings and lessons as examples.

Predators are esteemed as hunters, and often used in tribal members' Indian names and tribal place names. They are prominent features in our regalia, including sacred eagle feathers, talons, and for some, even the hides and claws of mammalian predators are worn. All of these predators are threatened by indiscriminate acts like poisoning.

We hope the responsible parties are caught and held accountable for their actions and encourage any others contemplating such measures to please reconsider.

Kat Brigham
CTUIR Board of Trustees chair

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