

# Living fully, joyfully together



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FROM SUNUP TO SUNDOWN

Hues of blue blanketed the sky, with occasional wispy, white clouds swirling above the tall pines. Sunshine streamed through the windshield, and I pushed my sunglasses on with ease. It was spring break, a week I had dreamed of for months.

A chance to catch up on some rest, work on a few projects around the house, read a book or two, and venture to places I had never been to before was what I had hoped would unfold. On this Thursday, in the middle of the vacation, I wasn't exactly sure where we were headed, but I was choosing to trust the journey enough to simply sit back and enjoy the ride.

The road weaved its way upward, with sporadic bumps and drawn out turns, while music played softly through the car speakers. The words spun their own story about looking for a road less traveled and not knowing what tomorrow holds, all of which seemed appropriate on every level. I laid my head back as I watched the scenery change ever so slightly, thoroughly enjoying being the passenger and not the driver.

It's not often that I have the opportunity to soak in the places or spaces I'm experiencing from the comfort of a heated seat next to my sister. She was navigating the uphill climb like a professional guide and I was thankful for the quiet.

We had reached the end of the paved road and parked in the nearly empty snow-

park, not knowing exactly what to expect, but ready for anything. Well, almost anything. With backpacks on, shoelaces tightened, and a bounce in our step, we started across the parking lot. A group parked just down from us smiled quietly and waved as they watched us make our way to the trailhead.

"Where are you headed?" the man asked.

"Paulina Falls," my sister responded. "Have you been there?"

"No, we were hoping to, but it looks a bit muddy for us, and I think the snow is deeper than we anticipated," the older woman replied. She added, "But I think you'll make it just fine. You look a bit more prepared than we do," when she saw us eye each other with a bit of worry.

I glanced at their shoes and saw they had on tennis shoes just like we did, and light sweatshirts like us, as well. Hmmm, I thought to myself. How are we any more prepared?

After a quick conversation that led us to believe we were headed in the right direction, with the necessary attire and equipment (even though it was identical to theirs), my sister and I ventured east. The trail was marked with snowmobile trail triangles and the ascent seemed to be very gradual, which we agreed was very doable.

The snow was packed firmly on the forest floor with visible tracks to follow, and the sunlight lit the way we needed to head as if it was a flashlight in the middle of the day. There was no doubt in either of our minds that this adventure we had just set out on was going to be a definite break we needed from the fast-paced life we both live.

As we walked we talked about books

we had recently read, music that spoke to our souls, and meals we had prepared that our family had actually enjoyed eating. The conversation was casual, but beneficial in every sort of way. There was no slander, no gossiping and no judgement. It was heavenly.

I'm not exactly sure when my sister and I realized that our pace had slowed to almost a crawl and our steps mirrored walking on a balance beam or tightrope instead of a climb. The higher our steps took us in elevation, the warmer it seemed to become, our feet sinking through the snow to our knees every few feet. We laughed out loud at ourselves continuously; our breathing heavy, as our lungs inhaled the mountain air.

I caught myself wondering if the people we had visited with in the parking lot were hidden in the trees watching us inch our way toward the falls or if a drone was hovering above filming the escapade. Our calves ached and our glutes were on fire, but we were determined not to stop.

One mile later, with soaking wet shoes and socks, we stepped right up to the edge of side-by-side falls. The cascading water and ice sparkled against the shimmering snow and beautiful blue sky. It was absolutely breathtaking, not only because of the journey it required to get there, but because of the glorious sounds and sights that greeted us upon our arrival.

All alone, we stood and stared out over the edge of the overlook in silence. How fortunate are we to live in such a beautiful part of the world? How lucky are we to experience a life of wonder and majestic moments like this one?

After a brief time of exploring the falls,

we continued east toward the lake. Again, we found ourselves completely alone, but this time with a half frozen-over Paulina Lake staring back at us, and an empty dock that jetted out across a part of the water calling our names. The sun warmed our faces while we soaked in the beautiful snow-capped Newberry Caldera peaks, and a soft breeze pushed the wisps of clouds around, as contrails left from traveling jets, crisscrossed the sky.

We had made it to the place we wanted to be with not a single soul in sight, and the entire collapsed volcano to ourselves. Sometimes journeys are meant to be mapped out with every minute, every turn and every mile accounted for. And other times, I truly believe that the journey is supposed to be a surprise and one that is filled with different possibilities. We live in a world where we want things spelled out for us, we want to be prepared for anything and everything, we want to avoid pain and suffering and we want to know exactly what will happen next. I'm all for having a plan and a map, but I'm also for trusting that my feet will take me to the exact place I'm supposed to be next, in an unplanned and undistracted kind of way.

That day with my sister is one I won't forget for a very long time. Every step led us closer to one of the most beautiful places in Oregon, and took us one day further into the story of our beautiful and yet brief lives. It wasn't without a fall or two, or without some pain, and definitely wasn't without some unpreparedness, but it was, and that is what I believe matters most.

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## Russia, Ukraine relations, the 21st century chapter



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PAST AND PROLOGUE

My March 10 column attempted to trace the evolution of the Russia-Ukraine relationship from common origins in Kyiv through the 1991 collapse of the USSR. For 10 years, the two countries coexisted peacefully as independent neighbors. The future became unclear when an ailing Russian President Boris Yeltsin stepped down in December 1999 in favor of Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer-turned-politician. This is where the 21st century chapter of Ukrainian-Russian relations begins.

Putin made a good first impression. He was younger and harder than Yeltsin, who famously drank too much and prompted embarrassing headlines on trips abroad. Russians appreciated Putin's business-like demeanor, and he seemed to embrace a new, cooperative relationship with the USSR's former rivals — the U.S. and its European allies. He was quick to offer assistance, for example, when President George W. Bush sent American troops to Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks. But few people understood then that Putin's world view was firmly anchored in the past.

For Putin and many Soviet citizens of his generation, the USSR was the greatest nation on earth. The United States was their arch enemy, as they believed it had tried to crush the Russian revolution, while hypocritically proclaiming the virtues of democracy, and was always scheming against the USSR. Many people also felt that the U.S. had somehow masterminded the USSR's 1991 downfall, and that the expansion of the NATO

alliance constituted deliberate disrespect of Russia. Historian Margaret MacMillan recently noted that Putin "came of age as the servant of a superpower and became the master of a Russia that was merely a regional power." The world would learn that long after the USSR's fall, Putin regarded the U.S. and its European allies not as partners in a new world, but as adversaries, agents of the USSR's and Russia's humiliation.

Putin began to reveal his true colors in 2004. Like his predecessors, he kept a close eye on Ukraine. If Ukraine's leadership is aligned with Russia, it functions as a bulwark against the U.S. and its allies. If it seeks closer relations with the latter, it becomes what some Russians see as a dagger aimed at Russia's gut. In addition, many ethnic Russians live in Ukraine, stoking fears that Ukrainians might mistreat Russians for Russia's past sins against Ukraine. Despite Ukraine's independence, Putin wanted it closely allied with Russia. Russian-Ukrainian relations thus became fraught after Ukraine's 2004 presidential election. Putin's preferred candidate appeared to have won, but revelations of election irregularities brought forth mass protests that ultimately invalidated the initial result. Putin soon made clear his displeasure with what he viewed as an anti-Russian outcome. A year later, in 2005, he declared the breakup of the USSR, in which Ukraine and Russia were united, was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. Two years later, he expressed sharp disagreement with his erstwhile partners, the U.S. and its allies.

At the 2007 Munich Security Conference, Putin took attendees aback with a grievance-laden rant. Where once he welcomed cooperation with his former adversaries, he now condemned a "world

in which there is one master, one sovereign," i.e., the United States. The U.S., Putin charged, "has overstepped its national borders in every way, visible in the economic, cultural and political policies it imposes on other nations." Putin condemned NATO as an anti-Russian alliance and warned ominously that Russia might do as it saw fit in relations with its neighbors.

Putin meant what he said. A former Soviet state, Georgia, recently had sought closer relations with the U.S., the European Union and NATO. NATO leadership had indicated both Georgia and Ukraine might be accepted as members sometime in the future. Putin responded in August 2008 by sending Russian forces into two disaffected regions of Georgia to goad the Georgian leadership into a war, which Russia won handily. Russia continues to occupy those two regions today. Because NATO accepts no new members with conflicts on its territory, Putin ensured Georgia would remain closely tied to Russia.

Then, in late 2013, Ukraine was plunged into crisis. The country had put much political and cultural distance between itself and Russia. Its citizens now studied Ukrainian rather than Russian in school, traveled extensively in Europe and had staged several free and fair elections. Ukraine's President, Victor Yanukovich, had promised to sign an association agreement with the European Union, a step towards full membership. But Yanukovich abruptly reneged on his promise, citing damage to Ukrainian-Russian relations. Outraged, Kyivans hit the streets and demonstrated against Yanukovich for three months, in what have become known as the Euromaidan protests. Yanukovich eventually sent security forces to disperse the demonstrators, but they kept coming,

even as soldiers used live ammunition. Ultimately, Yanukovich was forced to flee to Moscow, after which demonstrators discovered his luxe villa, persuasive evidence of his personal corruption. The Ukrainian Parliament declared it would ratify the agreement with the European Union, and Kyiv rejoiced.

Predictably, Putin saw Euromaidan as a betrayal of Russia. Thus the response was swift and harsh. In a partial replay of Georgia, Putin sent Russian troops into Ukraine's Crimea in March 2014. A referendum was hastily arranged, producing a suspiciously strong vote for joining Russia. Russian forces then occupied the mixed Russian-Ukrainian region of Donbas, to "protect" ethnic Russians against what Putin falsely claimed as Ukrainian "genocide." A low-grade war ensued between Russia and Ukraine. Just as in Georgia, Putin had created a territorial conflict that would complicate Ukraine's efforts to join NATO and the European Union.

By 2021, Putin had apparently decided to dispense with half measures and force the whole of Ukraine back into Russia's orbit. In a remarkable essay published in July, he declared there could be no Ukrainian sovereignty without Russian partnership, then massed troops on Ukraine's border. Those troops are now attempting to shell and bomb Ukrainians into submission in a full-on war. But Ukrainians are showing extraordinary determination and bravery in defending their independence. Knowing their commitment to a European rather than a Russian-dominated future, I would not bet against them.

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## Choose forest protection over biomass energy



MARINA  
RICHIE

OTHER VIEWS

It's no secret the peaks and rivers of Northeastern Oregon are magnificent, but there is a lesser-known wonder. This corner of the state is poised to weather climate instability better than most other places. Why? There still are intact forest headwaters holding and filtering waters — vital to fish and farmer alike. The remaining big trees and ancient groves are storing tons of carbon dioxide, and sheltering both wildlife and the human spirit, too.

That's why we must choose protection of our mature and ancient forests over false promises of biomass — the burning of trees as "renewable energy." Biomass burning power plants emit 150% the carbon dioxide of coal, and 300%-400% of the carbon dioxide of natural gas, per unit energy produced.

The "renewable" argument goes this way — trees grow back and will then once again store carbon. But trees burned today release carbon dioxide today — and seedlings take a long time to grow and cannot come close to rivaling the carbon storage of trees that are even 30 years old, let alone a century or more. Scientific studies are conclusive that the older and bigger trees store far more carbon and for longer than young trees.

I am mystified why biomass energy is taking off in Northeastern Oregon with a heavy reliance on subsidies — it's not cost effective. There's also the insidious argument that biomass simply uses up excess pieces of wood that would otherwise go to waste. No. Biomass creates a huge drive for wood, wood and more wood to burn. That wood comes at the expense of fish and wildlife habitat, functioning ecosystems and carbon sequestration.

Why would we want to add even more carbon dioxide into our atmosphere with some vague notion we will lower it later? Here in the West, we are in the worst megadrought in 1,200 years, according

to a February 2022 report in the journal Nature Climate Change.

And that's not all — the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change just released findings showing we are in big trouble — with billions of people around the world already suffering from sea rise, heat, flooding and extreme weather. We're seeing the effects here, and it's not going to get better with false solutions.

We must move quickly to reduce fossil fuel emissions and safeguard our carbon-storing trees. Instead, we're adding a staggering 40 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide per year to the atmosphere, while we're destroying the forests that are our allies.

But, what about the wildfires? Don't we have to thin forests in response and why shouldn't we then burn those trees for biomass? But here's the problem — thinning is often a term for industrial logging that is applied not just at the wildland urban interface but across wide swaths of forests and in the backcountry. Logging makes wildfires — and the climate crisis — worse.

Wildfires may billow smoke, but the

vast majority of forest carbon stays on site. Not so for biomass burned to completion. Yes, there will be more wildfires, but we live in ecosystems that have evolved with fire, but not logging. The key is to protect our communities by using our limited resources to thin small trees close to homes.

We still can keep Northeastern Oregon climate-resilient and beautiful — if we act now. Protect our mature and older forests and big trees on federal lands. Explore mechanisms to pay private landowners well for keeping their trees standing. Embrace solar, wind and energy conservation — in ways that preserve our natural ecosystems that are our last best hope.

I think we all want future generations to know the vanilla scent of a centuries-old pine and to be able to dip their toes into clear, cold, fish-filled rivers.

Marina Richie is a natural history writer, journalist and author of the forthcoming book, *Halcyon Journey in Search of the Belted Kingfisher*. She is a prior resident of La Grande, and now makes her home in Bend.