

**Siuslaw News**  
 P.O. Box 10  
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# Opinion



## A whisper rooted in thankfulness

inally from California. Seriously, folks. I've heard you whispering. But recently, I've come to realize there's a different reason I whisper when it comes to explaining where I was in relation to where I am now.

It's a whisper rooted in thankfulness.

It's the whisper that escapes you the moment after realizing how close you came to being in a serious accident. Or when the gas attendant asks if you want to use your .50-cent gas reward when you thought you only had 20.

"What? Yesss." Oregon changed my life for the better.

Twice, actually. First as a 15-year-old with my family, then again when I moved back as a 37-year-old

with my own family. In the first instance, it was culture shock just short of defibrillation as I went from the concrete jungle of Los Angeles to the blackberry hill-sides of the North Fork.

Instead of riding my Schwinn to school and spending afternoons running around

I'd known. It wasn't until returning that summer to visit my father in L.A. that I realized something that changed my life:

Everything I thought I knew wasn't nearly as important as how I'd come to know myself thanks to the life I was experiencing in Oregon.

Mostly because I didn't want my parents to hear and know they had been right.

I was still a teenager, after all.

The lessons learned and perspectives gained from life as an Oregonian were things I carried with me after graduating from Siuslaw High School and becoming a regional chef in Atlanta for the next 10 years.

But during all of that time, the thought of returning to Oregon stayed with me, particularly as the gains in my career began costing something far more important:

Time with my family. So when, in 1998, the opportunity was presented to begin a new career as a journalist, my beloved Oregon — and Florence in particular —

changed my life for the second time.

Come Thanksgiving, these are the things I'll be thinking about and quietly giving thanks for as my family gathers around a dinner table that, if not for Oregon's surreptitious intervention in my life, I may not be sitting at today.

On behalf of everyone at Siuslaw News, we wish you a very happy Thanksgiving and many reasons to be thankful.

Especially if, like me, you're originally from...  
 \*whispering\*  
 California.

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### From the Editor's Desk

NED HICKSON

the streets in my Nikes, I was canoeing over a flooded dike to meet my school bus and returning home to stack wood or dig post holes.

Usually in mud boots. I hated Oregon because it was the opposite of everything

Returning home at the end of that summer, I still remember stepping out of the car and onto our dirt driveway in a new pair of Nikes, realizing how those shoes — and that life — just didn't fit anymore. *This is home*, I whispered.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor concerning issues affecting the Florence area and Lane County. Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone number for verification.

Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Libelous and anonymous letters or poetry will not be published.

All submissions become the property of Siuslaw News and will not be returned.

Write to:  
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### Civil War Thanksgiving

**Editor's Note:** In the spirit of Thanksgiving, we are holding Letters to the Editor for this issue and, in their place, are sharing a bit of Thanksgiving history...

The first official proclamation declaring Thanksgiving a national day of remembrance was issued by Abraham Lincoln in 1863, partly in honor of Northern successes in the war that year. Lincoln designated the last Thursday in November "as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise."

That year, Thanksgiving fell on the day after a crucial Union victory at the battle of Chattanooga. The previous year in late November, armies were on the march during the Fredericksburg and Vicksburg campaigns. Around Thanksgiving 1864, some Union forces were on the cusp of the bloody battle of Franklin, while others were marching to the sea with William T. Sherman.

Due to their harsh surroundings, many Civil War men in the field enjoyed only the most spartan of celebrations. In Kewanee, Ill., teenage sisters Tirzah and Sarah Vaill received a letter from their older brother, an Illinois

infantryman, describing his 1861 Thanksgiving holiday meal as, "hard bread" and salt pork.

He added that "during the day I thought of you at home having your nice dinners" and "wishing maybe that you might present a plate to some of us soldiers filled with your own goodies."

From his camp in Virginia that same year, Private Zebina Bickford of the 6th Vermont Infantry made the best of his day. In a letter home, he mused that "you may think we are homesick today but it is not so," mainly because of a care package sent from loved ones back in Vermont.

The goodies consisted of "a box of clothing and a few nicknacks consisting of eatables" that made "a very good thanksgiving for us."

With tongue in cheek, he wrote that "you can't imagine what a lot of fine things we had for supper... a piece of sour bread and salt pork."

However, he gleefully noted that "some of mother's cookies and doughnuts that came in our box" made the evening memorable.

It would be Bickford's last Thanksgiving; he died the following April 30.

The next year, Asa Bean, a doctor in the 114th Ohio, enjoyed greater tidings. On Nov. 27, 1862, he wrote that "there has been a surprise party here today for the benefit of soldiers and nurses."

The feast included "roast turkey, chicken, pigeon and oysters stewed" along with "baked chicken, boiled potatoes, turnip, apple butter, and cheese butter."

Bean, though, lamented that he "cannot eat much without being sick."

He, too, would die months later.

Elsewhere that year, Federal soldiers stationed at Fort Pulaski, Ga., held their own "fete and festival." The day's events included target practice and a rowing match, foot race, and hurdle sack race.

Competitions involving a greased pole and a greased pig were also on the agenda, as was a "burlesque dress parade."

In some cases, Thanksgiving was a time of spiritual reflection. On the first official installment of the holiday in 1863, Sewell Van Alstine, a soldier in the 95th Illinois, wrote in his diary that he "went to town" and "heard an excellent discourse by an army chaplain at the

Presbyterian Church."

He also wrote there was "no drill today," a welcome respite.

In 1864, the Union League Club of New York City pleaded for donations of "cooked poultry and other proper meats" as well as "mince pies, sausages, and fruits" for men in the field.

The call brought in some \$57,000 in cash donations, as well as nearly 225,000 pounds of poultry and large quantities of cakes, gingerbread, pickles, apples, vegetables, and cheese.

One appreciative soldier saw the deeper meaning, writing that "it isn't the turkey, but the idea that we care for."

Others received far less. That year, Lewis Crater of the 50th Pennsylvania recorded in his diary that the Sanitary Commission "issued three fine apples to every man."

Despite the middling fare, Crater and others likely gave thanks that they had survived to see another Thanksgiving during the four bloodiest years in American history.

— Submitted by Tom Emery



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