



Stepping away for the Better

A farewell from sports editor
Sam Wright

His name was Andrew. He was 22 years old and had aspirations of becoming a Michelin-star chef and completed his culinary education at Pacific Culinary Institute in Vancouver, BC. Andrew and I both struggled with our similar and various mental health issues, and on March 1, at about 2:30 a.m., he was pronounced dead.

Broken. That's the only word I can think of for how I felt when his older sister called me that night.

Andrew and I grew up in the tiny island-state of Singapore. He lived there for about 17 years and I lived there for about 11. We were misfits: drinking and smoking from a very young age, living overseas allowed us to drink at bars and nightclubs since we were 14. That was probably how our depression and anxiety developed over the years.

Andrew developed a substance abuse problem while living in Canada. He was a victim of a city-wide epidemic in Vancouver where drug dealers were putting Fentanyl in cocaine. This claimed the lives of over 900 kids in 2016 in Canada alone. Chemically and economically speaking, it doesn't make sense for Fentanyl to be cut into cocaine; the word "narcoterrorism" has been thrown around since I heard of Andrew's death.

But that's neither here nor there. I am writing this now to say farewell to my readers and colleagues. The death of my best friend has awoken me to the realization of my own mental health issues and I will have to take a medical leave of absence for a few months.

I graduated high school from the Singapore American School in 2011 and immediately enrolled at the University of Oregon that fall. I suffered through a huge amount of culture shock. Coming to the United States, even though I'm American, was a big change for me.

I originally came to the UO for being accepted into the architecture school. But after realizing I couldn't draw, I decided to pursue my passion for writing at the School of Journalism and Communication.

I finished in the standard four years and graduated in 2015. That's when I came across the opening at the Cottage Grove Sentinel.

To be honest, I've never liked small-town America. I spent 11 years of my most important developing years living in Singapore, a nation at the forefront of the global conversation of culture and economics. I had traveled to over 30 countries before I turned 18. The happenings of a small town in Oregon seem so trivial after growing up with an international perspective.

But I must commend you, the readers and citizens of Cottage Grove. You were, more or less, very welcoming, very kind and very accommodating.

My employers at the Sentinel have been fantastic. They responded with compassion and understanding when I told them I needed to take a medical leave. It has been very uplifting.

But now I am stepping away. I need to take some time to get back on track towards my international aspirations. Andrew and I had the goal of opening up a restaurant in Chiang Rai, Thailand. Now that that dream has departed with the passing of my friend, I must regroup and move on in search of something that will be as fulfilling and that will be appropriate in his memory.

I would like to thank all of the readers that hung with me despite several shortcomings over the last 1.5 years. This job has been a great first step in a career, and hopefully it will launch me into a fruitful life. Perhaps I will return to Oregon, but for now, farewell and thank you for your reads.

Offbeat Oregon History

By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

From about 1913 on, every small boy in America knew who A.C. Gilbert was.

Somewhere on an advertising page in practically every youth-oriented magazine, his cheerful, immaculately dressed image could be seen, beaming over a neat bow tie and pointing proudly at a steam shovel, Ferris wheel, rocket launcher or some other motorized contraption built with the product he'd invented: Erector.

"Hello boys!" he'd be "saying," in a distinctive informal-looking italic type. "Make lots of toys!"

And, in their millions, boys did. (Girls, too, although in that era of more rigidly defined gender roles far fewer girls were encouraged to take an interest in such things.)

You might think a man who made a large fortune building what had to be the iconic toy of mid-century maker culture must have had a pretty interesting boyhood himself.

You'd be right.

Alfred Carlton Gilbert was born in 1884 in Salem, Oregon, and within six years of the event nearly everyone in the city was aware of the fact. There was clearly something special about this chipper-faced youth.

He came of a family of very strict Congregationalists, so Sundays were for worship and contemplation only. But every other day of the week, young A.C. and his friends were setting the neighborhood on fire.

Literally, that is. One of Gilbert's childhood memories, as he recalled in the memoir he wrote when he was 70 years old, was building a fire department in the family barn. He cut a hole in the floor of the haymow and installed a wooden pole to slide down and cots to pretend to sleep on. He also engineered and rigged a self-opening apparatus for the barn door.

Young Alfred and the other little "firemen" would all then lie down and pretend to be sleeping on the cots, like real firemen did when waiting for a call. Meanwhile, one of their number would run out and set a brush fire for them to extinguish (luckily, none of these ever actually got out of control; if they had, Salem would remember A.C. Gilbert rather differently than it does today!)

Then the young arsonist would return and ring the alarm bell, and the boys would all leap out of their cots, slide down the pole, take the "fire engine" — a boy's wagon with a 100-foot garden hose coiled up on it and a bell rigged to clang as it went — and race for the door. One of them would pull the lever, the door would open and out they'd go to save the day.

Young Alfred used the fire station as inducement to get the other neighborhood boys to help him with his chores. After all, many hands made light work, and they all wanted to play. The price of getting to play with Alfred's fire station was 10 or 15 minutes of helping him stack wood — and thus an hour-long chore was reduced to a few minutes, after which everyone got to play. It was truly win-win.

The kind of salesmanship shown by this gambit was not a fluke. Young Alfred was a salesman born — which is, indirectly, how he became a magician. In those days, around 1890, there was a magazine called the Youth's Companion. Boys and girls who sold lots of subscriptions to it earned credits that they could redeem from a catalog. Alfred enthusiastically dove into this, and after selling subscriptions to practically every other kid in Salem, redeemed his credits for a real magician's magic set.

It must have been a pretty good magic set. Soon Alfred was the

neighborhood magician. But what he learned from that magic set was, more than anything, the power of practice.

"I worked at my tricks hour after hour, day after day," Gilbert recalled in his memoirs. "Of course, I wasn't very good, but in time it was good enough to astound and delight my family and friends."

It was a lesson he took to heart. From that time on, Gilbert's life would follow a pattern: Find something worth doing, practice it relentlessly for thousands of hours, look up and realize you've become one of the world's best.

Of course, with magic shows, it wasn't nearly as simple as that sounds. But the young illusionist got good enough to impress professional traveling magician Hermann the Great during a Salem show in 1891. Alfred was called upon as an audience volunteer. After having rabbits pulled out of his pockets and an egg he'd carefully placed in a box transformed into a full-sized chicken, he got his chance when Hermann the Great asked him, "Now, son, don't you wish you could do things like that?"

"I can," returned the bold youth, and proceeded to show Hermann his best trick: he made a card disappear. Hermann's surprise, hammed up for the audience's benefit, was probably genuine: back-palming a card was a professional-grade trick, something he surely didn't expect to see from a 7-year-old boy in a remote rural outpost like 1890s Salem.

"You're very good, son," he told the youth. "You'll be a great success. Come back to my dressing room after the show, I'd like to talk to you."

Sometime after that, the Gilbert family moved to Moscow, Idaho. But Alfred came back to Oregon in 1900 to attend Pacific University in Forest Grove for his undergraduate degree.

At Pacific, he forged a reputation for mild mischief — stealing chickens to roast and eat over campfires in the woods, setting an outhouse on fire, that sort of thing.

He also forged a reputation as a world-class athlete — in no small part due to the fact that he was one of the few athletes in 1900 who recognized the value of constant practice. While a student at Pacific, Alfred set the world's record in chin-ups and the running long dive.

He met his wife, Mary Thompson Gilbert, at Pacific. "Alfred used to court me with one arm around my waist, and the other hand in his pocket — (practicing) back-palming a half-dollar," Mary recalled, years later.

Magic would be a huge part of A.C. Gilbert's life story. Oregon would, too. But, ironically, he would have to move decisively (if regretfully) away from both to achieve his biggest successes.

He left Oregon more or less for good when he graduated from Pacific and enrolled at Yale for medical school. While at Yale, he broke several more world records, including the pole vault and the rope climb, and founded a company with a friend: The Mysto Manufacturing Company, specializing in magic sets for professional and aspiring magicians.

And he left magic, more or less, in 1913 when he created the iconic Erector Set — the toy that would make him truly rich and famous.

But by then, he was well settled in on the East Coast, and his old neighbors and classmates in Oregon (and Idaho) could only look on from afar, taking pride in his success and remembering the old days when the bow-tied magnate was still a scruffy, likeable lad of 10 or 12, busily lighting brush fires and pulling rabbits out of an old hat.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Excited for Faye

We're going to have administrative savings of well over \$100,000 a year, every year Faye comes home to his family and balances out city staff in beautiful Cottage Grove. A valuable and respected liaison too no less, with Lane County Government itself.

As we grow as a community, our burdens will actually decrease!

We are all so lucky to have Faye join our community in a full time way. Welcome aboard Mr. Stewart. Hip Hip Hooray!
Mark Simeone

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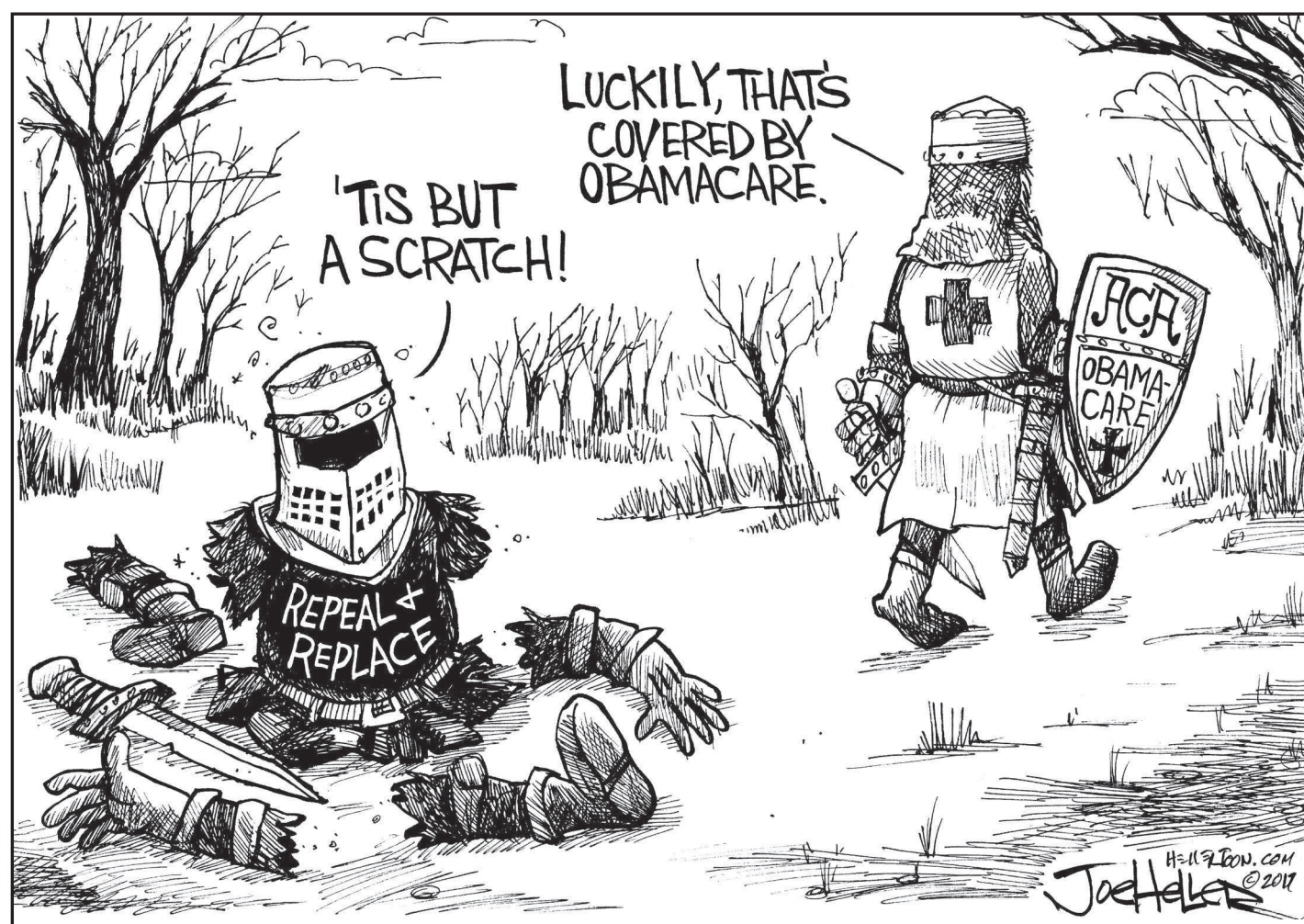
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Personal attacks and name calling in response to letters are uncalled for and unnecessary.

If you would like to submit an opinion piece, Another View must be no longer than 600 words.

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