



# Offbeat Oregon History: Vigilante gunfight

By Finn JD John  
For The Sentinel

In the 1890s, 47-year-old Kelsay Porter lived alone on a remote farm in the foothills of the Willamette Valley, in a tiny Union County community called Pine Valley. He was a shy, timid bachelor who had moved to this remote place for privacy, sometime in the 1880s. And for many years, he got his privacy, and lived harmoniously with the few neighbors.

But then the Mache family moved in next door. Ben and Mary Mache, with their 17-year-old son Ben Jr., had blown into Pine Valley a few months before, and already they had a reputation in the community as “hard characters.” This was especially the case with the younger Ben, who carried a six-shooter and used it far more than was considered appropriate. He didn’t use it to shoot to kill — but he’d been known to send bullets zipping past people’s ears to make his point. At Christmastime in 1895 he had just been released from the state prison, where he’d served a short stretch for rustling cattle.

For Porter the problem was, the most convenient road to the Mache farm was a shortcut across Porter’s land, which came within just a few feet of his barn.

Porter’s initial request that the Maches use a different route was ignored. So he built a fence across it. The Maches tore the fence down. Porter went to the justice of the peace to complain; the justice told him to just ignore them, because there was nothing the law could do about it.

But word of Porter’s complaint reached the Maches, and infuriated them. The elder Ben Mache threatened to kill Porter. Porter responded by having a judge put him in bond.

Young Ben Jr. was not under bond, though, and therefore could do as he wished without worrying about losing his bond. So he decided to get even, and he and a friend rode out to Porter’s farm with their six-shooters drawn. They found Porter working in his field, and opened fire — sending bullets zipping by his ears and into the ground near his feet. Terrified, Porter ran and hid in his house; thereupon, Ben and his friend leisurely stole some horse tack from his barn and went on their way.

It was after this incident that Kelsay Porter borrowed a Winchester rifle. He figured if the law wouldn’t do anything, he’d better be ready to do something himself.

Then came New Year’s Day in 1896.

The events of that day are still in some dispute. There are two versions: the one Kelsay Porter gave when he turned himself in later that day; and the one the Union County coroner and sheriff developed after looking over the scene.

Here’s Porter’s version of the story: On that day, the Maches were driving a sleigh pulled by two horses, returning home to their farm; Ben Jr. rode behind them. Porter was on the roof of his house, clearing off snow. As the sleigh passed his barn, Porter shouted at the Maches to stay off his land.

“You lie!” retorted the elder Mache. “This is a public highway. If you fence it up again, we’ll kill you!”

Ben Jr. apparently thought this was his cue to go into action, and he once again filled the air around Porter’s ears with buzzing lead. Porter jumped from the roof and again ran into his house — but this time, he didn’t stay in it. He came out with the Winchester ready to go, and he appears to

have gone clear berserk.

Ben Jr., sitting high on his horse, was the first to go down under a hail of Winchester lead, but Porter didn’t stop there. The team bolted with the sleigh; Porter followed after, still firing. A stray bullet killed Mary Mache. Another hit one of the horses and it fell dead, pitching Ben Sr.’s body over into the creek.

Porter continued shooting into the now-dead bodies of his neighbors until all of his bullets were gone — there were 18 bullet wounds found in the Maches, plus the one that hit the horse.

So, that was Kelsay Porter’s story, and he was sticking to it. But after traveling out to the farm from Union City, coroner E.R. Lang and sheriff’s deputy J.H. McLachlin started to suspect something fishy about his story. Dr. Lang figured out that Ben Sr. had actually been killed not by gunfire, but by being clobbered with something — probably the rifle butt. So Porter had chased Ben Sr. down, and beat him to death? And then stood over his obviously dead victims thumbing cartridges into the side of the Winchester for a good 45 seconds, then squared off and blasted away some more. Why? Because he was still blind with battle fury? Or to stage the scene so it looked more like a gunfight?

Also, the deputy found, looking on that roof, that much of the snow on it was packed down, and it looked an awful lot like someone had been lurking there waiting for the sleigh to come along. From up on that roof, Porter would have been able to see, and shoot, a good long distance.

Had Porter actually waited there, shot the boy from ambush before he could reach pistol range, then chased after the parents as they tried to race away on the sleigh, picking Mary off and then

shooting a horse to stop their flight? Had he then run up to the wreckage, clubbed Joseph to death with his empty rifle, reloaded, and pumped eight more rounds into the dead body so that it would look like a fair fight?

What he saw at the scene convinced the deputy that this was the real story. The real turning point was the finding of how Ben Sr. had died. Had “Old Man Mache” been killed in an exchange of bullets, with his notoriously trigger-happy son involved, no one would have made much of a fuss — not in eastern Oregon in 1896. And they probably would have viewed the shooting of Mary Mache as a tragic accident. But chasing a man down and bashing his head in with a rifle butt was not the sort of thing a fellow can claim was done in self-defense.

In the end the jury agreed, and sentenced Kelsay Porter to hang for murdering the family.

As the day of the execution drew near, Porter remained true to his shy, quiet nature. He gave no interviews and declined to say anything to the crowd of gawkers that stared up at him as he stood on the gallows on Friday, Nov. 9, 1897; he went to his death silent as a sphinx. But he wrote a short letter, just before his execution, and handed it to a Presbyterian minister to be released after his death.

“This is my last request on Earth,” he wrote. “The real cause of my trouble is the way children are raised to live too easy, regardless of the law of justice and right. Parents, please raise your children with a principle that will defend their character.”

In other words, he was blaming everything on Ben and Mary Mache’s parenting style.

## Dr. Fuhrman: Osteoporosis and how to prevent it

About 60 percent of women and 40 percent of men over 50 have low bone mass, and those numbers increase with age. The National Osteoporosis Foundation estimates that 50% of women and 25% of men over 50 will have an osteoporosis-related fracture during their lifetime.

Bone is constantly being broken down and rebuilt, and in osteoporosis, there is an imbalance leading to a decrease in bone mass and an increase in fracture risk. The best protection against osteoporosis is to tip the balance back toward bone building with a combination of exercise and excellent nutrition

Exercise: When we increase muscle strength, we increase bone strength, which is why strength training is important. Mechanical forces produced by

exercise stimulate activity in bone-building cells, leading to denser, stronger bones — not just stronger muscles. Weight-bearing exercises improve balance and build bone strength, and non-weight bearing strength training also helps increase bone density. While swimming and biking are good for cardiovascular conditioning, they don’t help protect against osteoporosis like running or lifting weights. In women who are at a risk for osteoporosis, back strengthening exercises are especially beneficial for protection against spinal fractures.

For women, I also recommend wearing a weighted vest for a few hours each day. A weighted vest can be worn during exercise and also while you work or shop and bend, stand, and move

throughout the day. Wearing a weighted vest also burns extra calories, increases core strength and stabilizes muscles, thus improving balance and decreasing the risk of falls.

Calcium from greens, seeds and beans: Ninety-nine percent of the body’s calcium is stored in bone. The intermingling of bone mineral with collagen fibers provides bone with strength and flexibility. A diet full of natural plant foods provides the calcium required to build strong bones. Green vegetables in particular are rich calcium sources. For example, one four-ounce serving of steamed kale has just as much calcium as one cup of cow’s milk. Broccoli, bok choy, sesame seeds, and garbanzo beans are also excellent calcium sources. Furthermore, the body absorbs about 50 percent of the calcium in many green vegetables, compared to only 32 percent of the calcium in milk. I don’t recommend high-dose (1000 mg/day) calcium supplements, because some studies have linked these supplements to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, and high dose calcium supplements have not been superior to lower

doses in studies on preventing bone fractures.

Magnesium from nuts and seeds: Calcium is important, but it’s not the only bone-building mineral. Sixty percent of the body’s magnesium, which is essential for bone formation and structure, is found in bone. Almost half of Americans do not meet the recommended intake for magnesium.

Vitamin K1 from green vegetables: Vitamin K is a crucial component for maintaining healthy bones, specifically for the process of bone mineralization. Higher intake of vitamin K1 is associated with lower rates of bone loss and fractures. Vitamin K exists as K1 and K2; the richest source of K1 is green vegetables, and K2 is produced by microorganisms. It is important to get both K1 from green vegetables and K2 from a supplement.

Plant protein from beans, seeds, and nuts: Starting in mid-life and especially after the age of 70, it becomes more important to ensure adequate protein intake for healthy bones. Phytate from beans, whole grains, nuts and seeds: Phytate was once known as an “anti-nutri-

ent,” a substance that prevents us from absorbing certain minerals, however the phytate in plant foods might actually benefit bone health. Studies have found that women who consume more phytate had either greater bone mineral density or less bone mass loss over time.

Antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables: The best foods for bone health are whole plant foods. Studies show that individuals with the highest consumption of fruit and vegetables have the strongest bones. Higher levels of oxidative stress are linked to lower bone mineral density, suggesting that the antioxidant content of fruits and vegetables may be partially responsible for their bone health benefits.

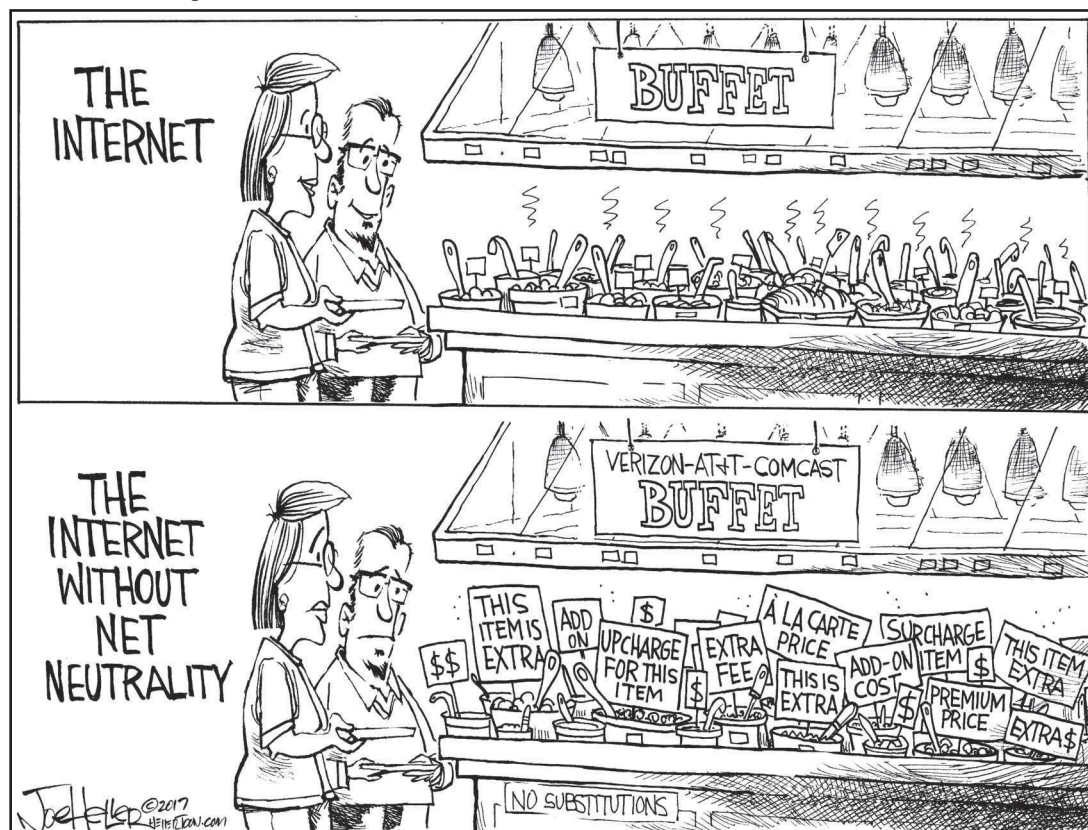
Bone-healthy supplements: The major source of vitamin D for most people is sun exposure, and vitamin K2 is not easily obtained from plant foods. It is important to get adequate amounts of these bone-supporting vitamins, and supplements are useful. Vitamin D regulates calcium and phosphorus absorption. The worst foods for bone health are those that cause calcium to be removed from bone and lost

in the urine. Excess sodium promotes the excretion of calcium. High caffeine intake is associated with increased bone loss and osteoporotic fractures. A nutrient-dense, plant-rich (Nutritarian) diet, combined with the conservative use of supplements assures individuals they are achieving maximum protection against later life disease.

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

According to Cottage Grove Sentinel article the recent waterline rupture causing some homeowners damage to their properties is not the City's fault and therefore the affected folks are stuck with the clean up bills and their homeowners insurance probably wont help them either for needed repairs. Per City's manager, Mr. Meyers stated that city will not help these tax paying citizens. He quotes that an investigation done by City / County Insurance Services declared that there was no negligence on the city's part. Perhaps no negligence but the city still owns the equipment, i.e. the waterline. His reasoning that maybe in the future there may be some kind of disaster, perhaps an earthquake and maybe some people may sue. Very lame explanation if you ask me. According to Meyers he doesn't want "open legal can of worms". I feel very sorry for the affected homeowners. If a law suit is in the cards for them, then maybe they can all chip in and get the legal representation they need for all of them. I just wonder if any of the City's upper management folks lived in this affected neighborhood then the outcome as far as help would be different?

Susan Zaji  
Cottage Grove



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