



# Offbeat Oregon History: No. 471

By Finn JD John  
For The Sentinel

Stapleton Airfield, Denver, Colorado — November 1, 1955.

The killer is sitting with his wife and young son at a little airport coffee shop, chewing on his fingernails, trying to act natural.

No doubt he's going over the numbers again and again in his mind. According to the schedule, United Airlines Flight 629 was supposed to arrive at 6 p.m., and be on its way to Portland at 6:30. That's what the killer planned for when he slipped a sack containing a 25-stick dynamite bomb into his mother's suitcase after they arrived at the terminal at around 5:30 p.m. He set the timer for 90 minutes, so that it would go off 30 minutes into the flight. By that time, he calculated, it would be over some of the most rugged, mountainous country in Wyoming. Everyone would assume the plane had crashed into one of those mountains, and even if they got wise, they wouldn't be able to get to the wreck site until the late-spring thaw — leaving him with plenty of time to cash out his inheritance and collect the payouts from the various life insurance policies he'd taken out on Mother.

It was a well-thought-out plan. But the airplane was already 11 minutes late when it arrived from New York. And now, sitting at that coffee shop table waiting as the scheduled 6:30 departure time comes and goes, the killer is meditating on how badly awry things could go, and trying to keep his nervous excitement secret from his family.

It turns out one of the other passengers — President Eisenhower's deputy secretary of public health, Harold Sandstead, who's on his way to Oregon State University to give a speech — is running late. Sandstead's connecting flight from D.C. has been delayed, and he's a big enough VIP that they're holding the flight for him.

So there he sits, this killer, with his family, at that little airport coffee shop, trying to eat, occasionally hurrying to the bathroom to vomit his nerves as the clock ticks on and the doomed airliner waits on the tarmac: 6:48 ... 6:49 ... 6:50 ... will the plane be delayed long enough for it to still be on the ground at 7 o'clock? If so, will the blast kill his mother, or will she survive ... and figure out what he tried to do? Is he about to lose ... everything?

What a sigh of relief he must have breathed when Flight 629 finally taxied into position and, at 6:52 p.m., launched itself into the black Colorado night sky.

The airliner was supposed to explode over the mountains, but it never even made it out of sight of the airfield. At 7:03 p.m., the air traffic controllers in the tower saw two bright lights appear suddenly in the sky northwest of the airport, then fall toward the ground. When they reached the ground, the bottoms of the clouds were suddenly lit up with another bright flash. It sure looked like an explosion.

Controllers got on the air and called for welfare checks from all the aircraft in the area. Flight 629 did not respond.

Meanwhile, telephone calls were pouring into law enforcement agencies from witnesses who had seen it. And some of those witnesses were already suspicious. If the plane had exploded in flight, how could it explode again when it hit the ground?

All that night and the next day, local first responders worked to recover the bodies — all 44 of them. The next day, FBI agents arrived. At the time, identification wasn't required to get on an airplane, so the airline didn't know who everyone was; with its extensive file of fingerprints, the Bureau was able to help.

But the Bureau was also looking into the cause, and quickly figured out what had happened. There was explosive residue all over the remains of the checked baggage, and the tail had been blown clean off the plane.

They looked at the luggage that was most heavily damaged in the blast; a 53-year-old businesswoman named Daisie E. King was on that list. They checked to see which of the passengers had air-crash insurance, purchased from vending machines in the airport; Daisie E. King was on that list too. Then they looked into her background, and quickly figured out who their number-one suspect would be: Ms. King's lean, squirrely 23-year-old son from a previous marriage, Jack Gilbert Graham.

Jack Gilbert Graham was born in 1932, at the height of the Great Depression. When, five years later, his father died, Daisie was forced by poverty to lodge young Jack at an orphanage. And

although Daisie remarried in 1941, to wealthy rancher John Earl King, she didn't bring Jack home from the orphanage.

Doubtless that's because new husband King refused to allow it. Whether it was because of abuse suffered in the orphanage, or just a natural baked-in sociopathy, Jack turned out to be the very prototype of a bad seed. He dropped out of school in the ninth grade and embarked on a career as a small-time hoodlum. His rap sheet soon grew to include bootlegging, gun possession, and a serious forgery case in which he stole checks from his employer, cashed 43 of them at \$100 each, bought a convertible with the proceeds and went on the lam.

But by 1954, he seemed to be doing better. He was married, with two kids. Daisie, his mother, very much hoped he was ready to settle down; and after the death of her new husband, she found herself in a position to help him. So she opened a fast-food restaurant in Denver — a broasted-chicken joint called the Crown-A Drive-In — and set Jack up as manager.

This did not go especially well. Worse, being entrusted with high-value things seemed to have inspired Jack to get into insurance fraud. Soon there was a strange gas explosion at the new restaurant, from which Jack collected \$1,200 in insurance money. Shortly thereafter, he turned in an insurance claim for his new 1955 Chevrolet pickup, which he said had stalled on the railroad track just in time to get hit by an oncoming locomotive. Nobody had been able to prove anything, but given Jack's track record, it seemed funny.

And now he was in a fair way to collect a whole lot more insurance money, wasn't he?

Jack Graham, of course, denied everything when the FBI started asking questions. But after the Bureau searched his home and found bomb supplies there (along with another \$37,500 in insurance policies taken out against his mother's life, on which he apparently intended to forge her signature), he confessed.

In preparation for the trial, federal authorities found, no doubt to their astonishment, that there was no law against blowing up an airplane. Of course, this oversight was quickly rectified; but that didn't help them with prosecuting Graham. The most they could get him for was "sabotage

during peacetime," which carried a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

Luckily, though, there was a law against murder — a state law, not a federal one. So the case was thrown over to the state of Colorado — which immediately got busy preparing to send Graham to the gas chamber.

This appears to have been the point at which Graham actually realized how much trouble he was in. Before that, as the Life Magazine reporter noted, his attitude was sullenly optimistic. "He seems to feel he'll be able to get out," a jailer told the reporter at the time.

But when the case was turned over to the state district attorney, and the phrase "gas chamber" started getting bandied about, suddenly Graham was recanting his confession and exploring the possibility of an insanity plea.

Psychiatrists evaluated him at the state hospital. To them, he said some very odd things; whether they were sincere, or represented him pretending to be crazy, is unclear. "(I realize that there were 50 or 60 people carried on a DC-6," the FBI file quotes him saying, "but the number of people to be killed made no difference to me; it could have been a thousand. When their time comes, there is nothing they can do about it.")

But then he followed up that cold-blooded morsel by adding that it was a great relief to tell the doctor about it, because he had been "quite science-stricken."

Unimpressed, the doctors certified him as sane.

After that, the outcome of the trial was never really in doubt. Jack Graham was convicted on one count of first-degree murder on May 5, 1956; and, after the usual round of appeals, he was ushered into the gas chamber at the Colorado State Penitentiary on Jan. 11, 1957. In his final words, there by the gas-chamber door, he doubled down on what he'd told the doctors earlier.

"As far as feeling remorse for these people (the 43 other passengers), I don't," he said. "I can't help it. Everybody pays their way and takes their chances. That's just the way it goes."

And that was just the way it went for Graham as well, about 10 minutes later, at 8:08 p.m.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Enjoying the dog park

Have you noticed your dog acting strange, distracted, or inquisitive when you're strolling downtown with her on your walk? There may well be a good reason why. You are probably in the vicinity of Lulu's dog park. Cottage Grove's first off leash area for our pets to run, fetch and socialize with each other. The park is located directly behind the DIY carwash on Main St.

Lulus was privately built by Steve Nicewander, the owner of the carwash. His vision of creating a dog park turned into reality when the park opened around the first of the year. No public tax money was used in it's construction.

The Cottage Grove Police Department provides protection for the park in case of an emergency. Dogs of all ages and sizes are welcome, but dogs displaying aggressive tendencies are encouraged to stay home.

Nicewander has provided poop bags and trash cans at each end of the park, and patrons must pick up their dog's waste. Rules of the park are posted at each entrance. A very important one is that owners must keep a watchful eye on their pet while visiting the park.

The park is funded by the Cottage Grove Car Wash. Nicewander has installed a kiosk in the middle of the park, for any animal related posts. There are soon to be functioning dog bone machines located at either end of the kiosk. When this project is completed, it will be a nice way of saying 'thanks' to Nicewander, as well as paying forward, on a small scale, to the Cottage Grove community effort to keep our park safe for the human and animal interactions that are so vital to most dog owners.

The park has recently been retro-fitted with pipes that will provide water for the dogs and sprinklers for the grass beginning in Springtime. Meanwhile, patrons who frequent the park are encouraged to bring their own water for their pets.

As with any dog park, there are the regulars that come frequently. On any given day, you may be greeted by the 'welcoming commit-

tee', a pack of small, but vocal dogs who, on their own, are playful, loveable and quiet. When these guys band together though, they charge the fence or gate, vocalizing their greetings for all to hear. It's quite amusing to watch!

Lulus is a great place for all dogs; large and small, old and young.. There have been dogs as old as 15 who have visited the park. One female who comes to visit can be seen eating dirt instead of retrieving the ball. Another will greet you at the gate and follow you around, hoping for treats. One is known for her drooling jowls, while many, many others are all about the ball. It's as if their life revolves around it. Then there are others who find contentment just being part of the ambiance of the park. They stay with their owners, who might be in a group socializing themselves.

The many different animal breeds that visit the Lulu's are matched with the myriad of owners who frequent the park. There are all walks of life: retired, students, vetrans or professional people, artists, homeless, musicians, unemployed and disabled people. Everyone is interested in a safe and relaxing visit. The nice thing about dog parks is the actual diversity of it's clientele. We are many different people, but the bonds of commonality are strong between us through our animals themselves.

The dog park is open from dawn to dusk, but with the cold weather approaching, the park will undoubtedly get much less use. We here in Oregon know that there is winter, then there is July.... Most of us will be home this winter, trying our hardest to think of appropriate activities we can entertain our pets with, until the rainy season is finally over. Last year summer fell on a Saturday... so let's hear it for Saturday! Afterall, it's just around the corner isn't it?

Cathy Benjamin  
Cottage Grove

### North Douglas first quarter honor roll

4.0 – 3.8:  
Joanna Alcantar  
Estefani Alcantar  
Gerardo Alcantar  
Katelyn Andes  
Andy Barrone  
Kyle Bowen  
Tim Claiborne

Amy Dooley  
Aedon Douglas  
Lilly Downie  
Natalie Draeger  
Tim Ford  
Austin Frieze  
Shayla Holmberg  
Levi Jentzsch

Brandon Rundell  
Abby Whipple

3.79 – 3.5  
Sofia Alcantar  
Cody Black  
Carson Burris  
Arianna Helgren

Please see **HONOR ROLL PG. A11**

### Letters to the Editor policy

The Cottage Grove Sentinel receives many letters to the editor. In order to ensure that your letter will be printed, letters must be under 300 words and submitted by Friday at 5 p.m. Letters must be signed and must include an address, city and phone number or e-mail address for verification purposes. No anonymous letters will be printed. Letters must be of interest to local readers. 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. To avoid transcription errors, the Sentinel would prefer editorial and news content be sent electronically via email or electronic media. Hand written submissions will be accepted, but we may need to call to verify spelling, which could delay the publishing of the submission.

## Cottage Grove Sentinel

(541) 942-3325

### Administration

James Rand, Regional Publisher

Gary Manly, General Manager ..... Ext. 207  
gmanly@cgsentinel.com

Aaron Ames, Marketing Specialist ..... Ext. 216  
aames@cgsentinel.com

Tammy Sayre, Marketing Specialist ..... Ext. 213  
tsayre@cgsentinel.com

### Editorial

Caitlyn May, Editor ..... Ext. 212  
cmay@cgsentinel.com

Zach Silva, Sport Editor ..... Ext. 204  
zsilva@cgsentinel.com

### Customer Service

Carla Williams, Office Manager ..... Ext. 200  
Legals, Classifieds ..... Ext. 200  
cwilliams@cgsentinel.com

### Production

Ron Annis, Production Supervisor ..... Ext.215  
graphics@cgsentinel.com

(USP 133880)

### Subscription Mail Rates in Lane and Portions of Douglas Counties:

Ten Weeks ..... \$9.10  
One year ..... \$36.15  
e-Edition year ..... \$36.00

Rates in all other areas of United States: Ten Weeks \$11.70; one year, \$46.35, e-Edition \$43.00.  
In foreign countries, postage extra.

No subscription for less than Ten Weeks. Subscription rates are subject to change upon 30 days' notice. All subscriptions must be paid prior to beginning the subscription and are non-refundable.  
Periodicals postage paid at Cottage Grove, Oregon.

Postmaster: Send address changes to P.O. Box 35, Cottage Grove, OR 97424.

### Local Mail Service:

If you don't receive your Cottage Grove Sentinel on the Wednesday of publication, please let us know.  
Call 942-3325 between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m.

### Advertising Ownership:

All advertising copy and illustrations prepared by the Cottage Grove Sentinel become the property of the Cottage Grove Sentinel and may not be reproduced for any other use without explicit written prior approval.

Copyright Notice: Entire contents ©2017 Cottage Grove Sentinel.