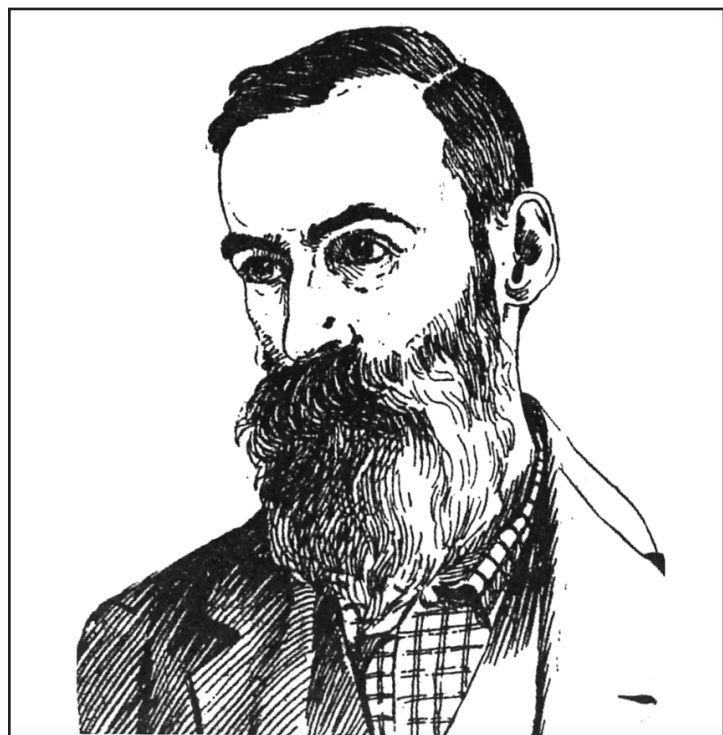




Offbeat Oregon History: A 515-day case for insanity



By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

Charles Fiestler really, really didn't want to die.

Fair enough; most of us don't. His wife, Nancy, hadn't wanted to die either; but she'd been trying to leave their 30-year marriage and had taken up with another man, a Mr. Mudd. And, well, one thing had led to another and the next thing anyone knew Fiestler was dragging her by the hair to a mud puddle and drowning her in it, while their three youngest children looked on in horror.

As a result, on Sept. 30, 1895, he found himself facing a jury in a Josephine County court. And those jurors weren't turning out to be particularly favorably disposed toward him.

His attorney had pleaded not guilty by reason

of insanity. The problem for Fiestler was, this was a few years before the great deluge of "temporary insanity" pleas in "unwritten law" murders, and insanity pleas were still very hard to pull off. For a man who's never shown much history of insanity, it was a near-impossibility.

Fiestler did have a history of something else, though, something kind of like insanity — but it was something that wasn't helping at all with his case: an anger problem.

He and Nancy had been married 30 years before, when he was around 22 and she a middle-school-age waif of 12 or 13. Since that time, she'd borne him 10 children, who now ranged in age from 6 to 28. Coworkers and acquaintances knew Fiestler as a soft-spoken, stoop-shouldered man with a reputation for being

a reliable, hard worker, a former officer with the Salem Police Department in the early years before he moved with his family to Kerby and Merlin.

But close neighbors knew better. And the prosecution had talked to those neighbors, and now they were appearing in court testifying to all the times Nancy had turned up at their houses with bruises and injuries and other evidence of his violent temper.

Then, too, the Fiestler family was still a little notorious after the events of the previous year, when a Lebanon man had been shot in a fight over Fiestler's 21-year-old daughter Jessie "Jet" Black. Jet and her husband, Sam Black, were separated, and apparently Jet Black was seeing a little too much of a man named Jesse Rice for Sam's taste. On the evening of Oct. 3, 1893, Sam unexpectedly showed up at his estranged wife's residence and, finding Jesse Rice there, shot him dead.

Two love triangles turned deadly, in the same family, within the space of a year. Sheer coincidence, of course; but it wasn't a good look.

Finally, the lawyers wrapped up their closing statements, and the jury took just 40 minutes coming to a verdict: Guilty of first-degree murder.

Fiestler wasn't too worried at first. He seemed pretty sure that he would be able to get the Supreme Court to overturn the conviction or commute it into a prison sentence.

Sure enough, a few days before his scheduled execution date, the Supreme Court issued a stay of execution to buy it a little time to review his claim of insanity. And it was just after this that Fiestler abruptly went into a catatonic state. He lay there on his bunk, neither speaking nor responding to anyone around him, staring straight at the ceiling, all day. And all the next day. And the next.

The psychologist sent in by the court proclaimed him insane. That being the case, of course, he could hardly be executed.

But for some reason — maybe somebody smelled a rat? — the court never got around to declaring him not guilty on that basis. He just stayed there, in the Josephine County jail. Deputies had to feed him, presumably some sort of liquid diet. Deputies also had to help him with other personal-care matters. It's not clear how they did this, since they didn't share the details with the newspapers; but most likely it involved some form of diaper that had to be changed several times a day, as with a baby.

A year slipped by, and most of another one. The sheriff tried at least once to get rid of the huge, bearded baby in his jailhouse; but his requests to get Fiestler transferred to the Oregon State Hospital (then called the Oregon Insane Asylum) went nowhere. Most likely Fiestler's lawyer's well-meaning attempts to keep his client out of court were the source of the trouble.

In any case, 515 days went by with Fiestler apparently catatonic. Then, on May 10, 1897, two of Fiestler's sons, 26-year-old William and 18-year-old John, were caught burgling a smokehouse to

steal bacon, and lodged in the jail with their "catatonic" father. William was set up in the room with his father, and several other jail occupants heard them whispering together, late in the night.

The next morning, the deputy in charge of feeding Fiestler walked in with a plate of food and set it down on the table next to him.

"You can eat that, or let it alone," he told Fiestler. "I will never feed you again."

He walked out. And upon his return an hour or so later, the plate was empty.

"Old man, you have played your game well," the deputy told Fiestler.

"Yes," said Fiestler — the first words he'd spoken out loud in nearly two years — "but it has been hard."

Fiestler's insanity having been exposed as a ruse, his case was reactivated, and a few months later, on April 21, 1898, he was once again sentenced to hang, the event scheduled to take place on June 10.

On the appointed morning, Sheriff Joseph G. Hiatt found Fiestler once again lying on his cot as if dead. He could not be roused; his eyes rolled back in his head, and he seemed to be having trouble breathing. His gasping and rattling sounded so believable that the sheriff postponed the hanging, hoping that he'd die of his own accord before too long and no one would have to burden his conscience with the serving of a death sentence upon him.

But by 1 p.m., nothing had changed, so the sheriff had the still-unresponsive Fiestler strapped to a board and hauled to the gallows, where — still unresponsive, and apparently unconscious — he was hanged without incident.

It may have been the only time in Oregon history that an unconscious man was hanged. But, of course, that only goes if he really was unconscious. After his 515-day charade, the sheriff didn't believe he really was, and apparently neither did anyone else.

Dr. Joel Fuhrman: Soups, essential for high-nutrient diet

Soups, along with salads, are an essential part of a high-nutrient (Nutritarian) diet, and for good reason. Vegetable and bean soups and stews are nutrient-rich, flavorful and easy to prepare. They can be served as a complement to a meal or as the centerpiece. Soups can easily be cooked in bulk to provide several days' worth of leftovers, convenient to have on hand at home or to take along to work or school. Soups and stews are warming, satisfying and satiating and can widen your nutrient diversity. They can be made from a variety of fresh, frozen or even leftover ingredients and allow for experimentation in a pot, pressure cooker, slow cooker or even right in a Vitamix or other high-powered blender.

Since soups are gently cooked with a liquid base, nutrients are retained and some are made more absorbable. Many nutrients, like niacin, folate and a range of minerals, are water soluble. Normally, with water-based cooking, like boiling, water-soluble nutrients are leached into the cooking water and discarded. However, with soups, the liquid and the water-soluble nutrients are retained and consumed.

Cooking soup heats, moisturizes and softens vegetables and beans,

which dramatically increases the potential digestibility and absorption of the nutritious compounds contained within them. Recent studies confirm that the body absorbs more of the beneficial anti-cancer compounds, carotenoids in particular, especially lutein and lycopene, from cooked vegetables as compared to raw vegetables. Scientists speculate that the increase in absorption of these antioxidants after cooking may be attributed to the destruction of the cell matrix or connective bands to which these compounds are bound.

Additionally, cooking vegetables in soups breaks down the cellulose within them and alters the plants' cell structures, which facilitates digestion. This way of cooking also prevents foods from browning and forming toxic compounds, like acrylamide, which is formed in dry, high-temperature cooking, like baking, frying and grilling, and is a potential carcinogen or cancer-causing agent.

Start your soups with a base of water and fresh vegetable juice, like carrot, celery or tomato juice or a no-salt-added vegetable broth, with less than 200 mg of sodium per cup. Next, add some dry beans, as they take the longest to cook. Then, add some onions, leeks or other mem-

bers of the Allium family, leafy green vegetables, other vegetables that you have on hand, and some herbs, spices or fruits like parsley, black pepper or lemon.

Be sure to include some cruciferous vegetables into the mix, such as kale, bok choy or cabbage. Chop or blend most of the vegetables before adding them to the pot to form organosulfur compounds in the onions and isothiocyanates (ITCs) in the cruciferous vegetables, which are very important disease-fighting phytochemicals.

To make a creamier soup and add another layer of flavor blend some nuts into the soup. Cook a large pot of soup at least once a week and store leftovers in individual containers, in the refrigerator for five days or longer in the freezer. Be wary of commercially available canned soups, as they are often high in sodium.

Quick, hot, tasty and nutrient dense—soups in all of their varieties are a great way to experience the pleasures of the Nutritarian diet.

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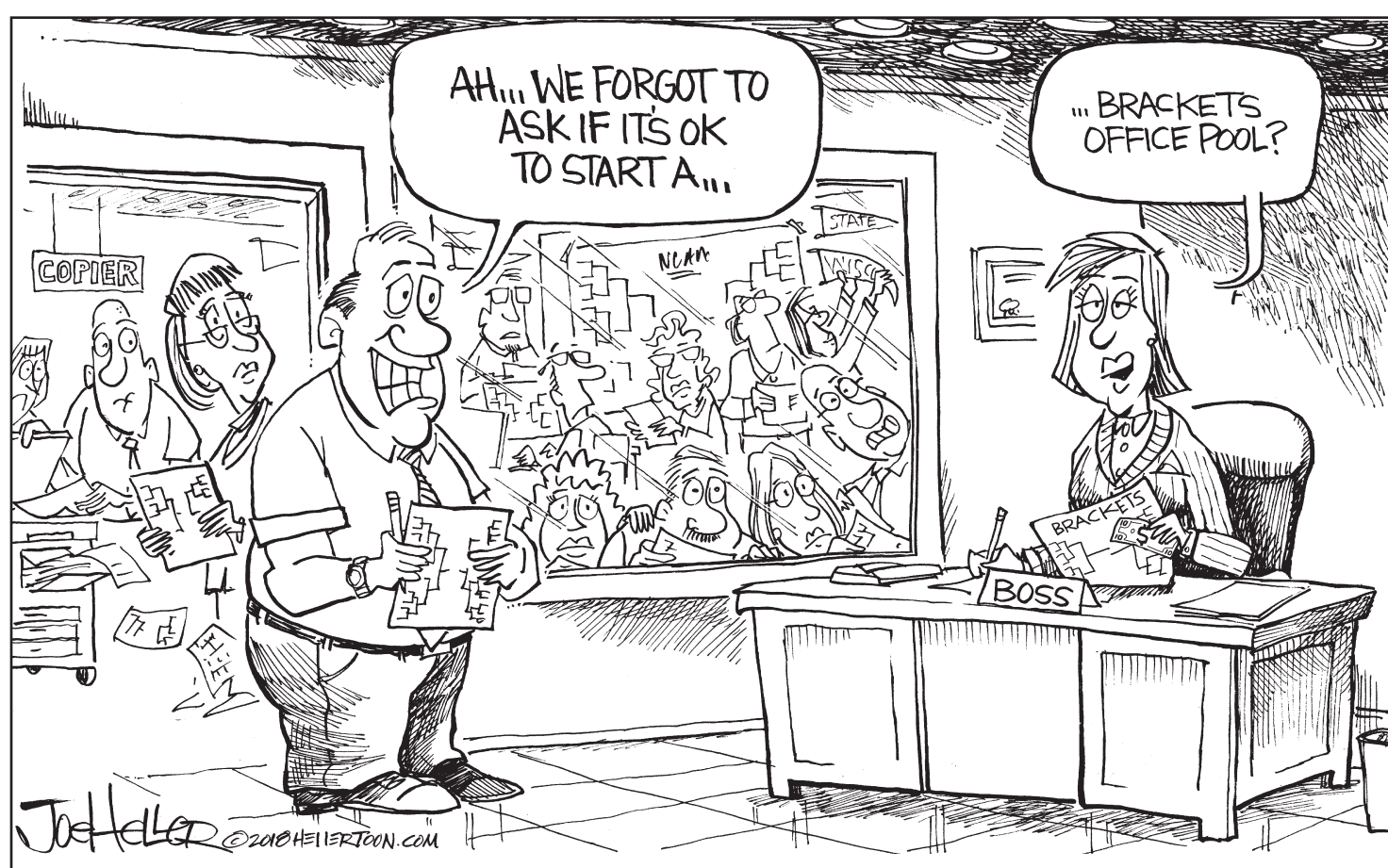
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IN BRIEF MARCH 21-MARCH 30

"Swing the Bridge" a benefit to raise awareness and funds for the repair of the Swinging Bridge will be held at the armory on March, 24 from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. Live bands. Tickets \$10 at the Book Mine but no one turned away for lack of funds. For more information, contact (541) 942-7037.

Science Pub (free) beginning at 5 p.m. at the Axe and Fiddle on Main St. on Tuesday, March 27.

Umpqua Community College Board of Education meeting to be held today, March 21 at 4:30 p.m. in ESB 15.

Have an event, lecture, fundraiser or class you want the community to know about? Send details to cmay@cgsentinel.com to be featured in this space.

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