

Cottage Grove Sentinel

116 N. Sixth St.

Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

Opinion

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



The message of Rufus Valentine

our hands.

I'd dealt with worse things.

The complaints started soon after we opened.

Since our restaurant was

dried to the point of splitting. He gave me an appreciative nod and sipped, then blurted "fettuccini Alfredo." He laid the menu down and pointed to the

Valentine, that's exactly what happened.

When my shift ended, it was near dusk. Along the sidewalks, automated lamps had started humming to life. As I approached the parking tower, I noticed flashes of red and blue spilling from the shadows of the underground level where I was parked. The closer I got, the more patrol cars I saw.

At the edge of the drive, yellow crime scene tape had been strung. Taking a spot among a crowd of onlookers, I saw a white sheet — and the callused hand of Rufus Valentine protruding from beneath it. Next to him, his wings lay in a crumpled pile.

I later learned that Rufus Valentine — born Rufus Jones in 1936 — had left the mall that day and taken his message to the parking garage. It was there that he encountered a street gang and attempted to "spread the love."

He met the faces of prejudice and hatred instead.

With the approach of Martin Luther King Day, he always comes to mind.

And, also, no small measure of guilt. Had I left him alone to do his work, or brought him lunch, things might have turned out differently.

Even though he's no longer here to sling his arrows, I hope we can take his message to heart — and spread the love: one brother, one sister at a time.

Note: I originally wrote this editorial in 1998 during my first year as a journalist. It's my way of honoring Rufus Valentine and carrying on his message — a message that seems particularly important on many levels at this moment.

From the Editor's Desk

Ned Hickson

situated closest to the mall entrance, we got the brunt of unhappy mall dwellers.

"Hey, there's some guy shooting people with rubber arrows out there," one of them said, brandishing the arrow in question and rubbing his cheek.

With security nowhere to be found, I decided to settle the matter myself and strode out the door — and was immediately tagged.

"Got you! Spread the love, brother," Rufus said, as if he'd tossed me a box of chocolates instead of nailing me with a rubber arrow.

"Excuse me, but you'll have to stop with the arrows. My customers are complaining," I said.

In that same instant, he plugged a passerby who turned and gave me a dirty look, spouting something about restaurant promotions getting out of hand.

A sudden ebb in the shopping current allowed me to grab his attention.

"Hey, it's almost noon. How about lunch on me?"

"What'cha got?"

"Come in and find out," I said, ushering him inside and up to the counter in hopes of containing him through the lunch rush.

Sitting there at one of the stools, his wings protruding from either side of the chair back, he drew more than a few stares.

Handing him a soda, I noticed that his dark black hands were worn and callused. His fingernails had

item, as if I wouldn't know it otherwise.

"Coming right up," I said, and took the menu. As I turned to ring in his order, I saw him reach for his quiver.

"Hey," I said, one hand on his drawing arm. "Here's the deal. No matchmaking until after lunch."

He studied me for a moment, then set his bow on the counter. "I'm no matchmaker. I'm just tryin' to spread the love — one brother, one sister, at a time."

"That's a nice sentiment; just don't do it in here, OK?" I said and released his arm.

I think everyone has said things that they wish they hadn't. In the top 10 of my own regrettable phrases, that one ranks right up there. First, because of my tactics to control him. Second, because he called me on it. And third, because I wouldn't get the chance to take it back.

With the smell of parmesan and cream sauce in the air, this obviously hungry man stood from the counter, grabbed his bow and quiver, and left the counter.

"People need love more than I needed fettuccini Alfredo," he said, and exited the restaurant. When he kept going, I considered myself lucky.

He could become someone else's headache.

Unfortunately for Rufus

LETTERS

THANK YOU TO COMMUNITY

The staff of Bohemia Elementary School would like to say a very heartfelt thank you to the many people who donated to help bring Christmas joy to many children in our community.

The generous donations received from individuals and businesses helped bring joy to more than 145 children.

It is without a doubt that we say we could have not achieved this without the support from many of

you and we could not be happier to be part of this wonderful community where we put kids first.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

—Gina Hutchins
Bohemia Elementary



Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. 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.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

Political/Election Letters:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must: 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

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