

STUMPS

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They jut from the pinegrass like elderly molars, eroded in many cases to a jagged facade of their original bulk, much of the heartwood having returned to the soil that nourished it.

The sight of one of these relics often spurs a queer sense of nostalgia — queer because I have no personal connection to the history of this place, yet I feel something like the same sensation as when I ponder events that are part of my own life story.

This emotion is pleasant but also a trifle unsettling. It's as if the weight of all those years has roiled the placid progression of time, creating a series of swells that leave me slightly seasick.

As I kneel beside the gaunt remnants of a tree that might once have soared 100 feet, and run my fingers across its sand-papery surface, I am struck always by the dichotomy of constancy in a world defined by change, by

events both modest and epochal.

I imagine how much has happened while this formerly grand tree, which once perfumed the warm summer wind with its strong sweet scents of bark and sap and needle, was making its inexorable transition to the mere husk that is all I will ever see, or touch.

That tree might have been standing still when the armies of Europe were wasting themselves in the mud of France and Flanders, at Ypres and Verdun and the Somme.

But surely it was a stump — though a much more solid stump than now, solid enough to make for a proper stool — when the stock market crashed in 1929.

What, I wonder, did it look like 16 years later when, less than 20 miles away, the people of Baker were joining their fellow Americans in celebrating the end of another, even worse, world war.

Or on Nov. 22, 1963, when our president was slain.

Or on any other landmark day in the ensuing decades.

I know only that it was here, in this very spot, on every one of those days. And every other day in between.

Inevitably this exercise leads me to think about the very beginning of the story — the birth, as it were, of the stump, when it ceased to be a tree.

It is very nearly a compulsion.

I wonder, even though I know I will never reveal the truth, about the men who stood on this very patch of ground, possibly before any of my grandparents was born. I think of them as they sized up this tree, gauged its lean as against the lay of the land, and plotted where they would wish for it to fall if they did the work properly.

I try to conjure, from the unfathomable depths of time, the sound as the saw made its first bite into the bole, the sharp fresh smell and the bright white drift of the chips as they began to accumulate, like the flakes of a winter squall, around

the leather cork boots.

Who were these men? Were they here on a scorching July afternoon, the sweat soaking their plaid shirts even before the sawing commenced? Or were they grateful for the exertion to warm their blood on a frigid February morning?

What did they think about, these men who had never seen television, perhaps never even heard a radio?

Was the felling of this tree for them a routine job, anonymous among the hundreds they dropped in a career? Or was this tree made slightly memorable because someone smashed a thumb under a wedge, or sliced a thigh in an instant of carelessness, lulled by the rhythm of the slashing saw, leaving a scar that the sawyer still remembered, still felt the vestigial searing pain, in his own final hour?

The stump of course is silent, no more able to tell its story than a chunk of stone can explain how it came to be, belched from a volcano or compressed from layers of sediment

over the millennia on the bed of a distant sea.

Yet the stump is also here, a real and solid link to those men, even if the surfaces they touched have long since decomposed.

To people, with our puny lifespans, wood seems all but perpetual. But compared with the rocks, even the span of a Methuselah pine is a brief interval, scarcely measurable.

The stumps that enliven my hikes in the hills above the Powder River will persist long after I am making my

meager contribution to whatever patch of soil I end up in.

But one day they too will disappear, their stories, whatever they could have been, finally and irretrievably lost.

This saddens me in a way I find impossible to express.

It is, I suppose, the peculiar melancholy that attends the finality not of death itself, but of the moment when the last shred of anything that once lived can no longer be grasped, or knelt beside in a lonely woods.

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HOROSCOPES by Stella Wilder

SATURDAY, MARCH 26, 2022 YOUR BIRTHDAY by Stella Wilder

Born today, you have a great deal of charisma and could, if you so choose, take all sorts of advantage of all sorts of people simply by flashing your irresistible smile and saying and doing what they think they want you to say and do -- but that's not your way. You are far more genuine than that, and far more interested in dealing with other people in ways that are suitable to the situations in which you find yourself.

SUNDAY, MARCH 27

ARIES (March 21-April 19) -- A little gentleness can get you much further today than any use of force. You can perhaps get someone to agree to your terms before you ask.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) -- A minor victory turns into a major one today, and you'll have something to celebrate when you realize you've charted a new path forward.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) -- It may be next to impossible today for you to choose sides, though the fact that you understand both points of view can serve you quite well.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) -- A Taurus or Gemini native appears as if from nowhere today and influences you in a manner that you may be talking about for quite some time.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) -- You've managed to balance some very disparate elements, but today your work may be threatened by someone who doesn't know what it's all about.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) -- A family member needs precisely what you can give today, but this means you're going to have to alter what was a "perfect" schedule.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) -- You have what someone wants, and vice versa -- so there is likely an arrangement to be made here that can satisfy both of you quite well.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) -- You may have to do something you swore you'd never

do -- but very few people will notice, so your reputation should not be at risk.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) -- Others are relying on your clear vision and honesty at this time. You can provide what is needed without asking too much in return.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) -- You may wish things would return to "normal," but the fact is that what you are experiencing may well be the "new normal," and that's that!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) -- You can get a good deal of work done early in the day, leaving plenty of time for you to engage in an activity that is personal in nature.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) -- You can't get something for nothing today -- try as you might. The experience gives you a new appreciation for what someone has done.

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Drug Problem? We can help! Narcotics Anonymous Phone: 541-805-2229 www.neo-na.org

DO YOU HAVE...HURTS, HABITS and/or HANG UPS? 12 Step Biblical Support Harvest Church 3720 Birch St. Baker City Thurs., 6:30 - 8:30 PM

LA GRANDE GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS Every Friday Night @ 5pm, 2107 Gekeler Ln, LG, Church of Christ basement. For more info please call 971-219-8411

Someone's drinking a problem? AL-ANON Meetings are available by phone Info for Baker City Meetings Call: 541-239-7323

CELEBRATE RECOVERY Calvary Baptist Church Third & Broadway Baker City, OR EVERY THURSDAY 6:15 - 8:00 PM

AL-ANON Attitude of Gratitude. Wednesdays, 12:15-1:30pm. Faith Lutheran Church. 12th & Gekeler, La Grande Please wear a mask & practice social distancing 541-786-2051

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS Goin' Straight Group Meetings: Mon., Tues. Thurs. & Fri. Start at 8 PM Episcopal Church Basement 2177 1st Street, Baker City

OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS Would you like to stop compulsive eating? For Information Call 541-523-5128 Leave a Message Email: ecapoa@live.com

PEOPLE with PARKINSON'S Caregivers, Family, Friends SUPPORT GROUP Contact Judith at 208-855-9199 Meetings resume @GRH when restrictions ease.

AL-ANON FAMILY GROUP Support for family & friends of Alcoholics Tuesday evenings: 6-7pm Joseph Methodist Church (basement on northside) Joseph, OR Contact 541-398-1398

AL-ANON Help for persons who have been affected by someone else's drinking Saturday, 9 a.m. NOCC - Nazarene Church 1250 Hughes Ln. • Baker City (541)519-7227 or (541)239-7323

Are You Lonely? Do You Need Help? Are You Looking For A New Direction? A.C.T.S. Alcohol Chemical Treatment Series Meetings at: Lighthouse Church 10501 W 1st Street Island City, OR 97850 Tuesdays @ 7PM

SATURDAY, MARCH 26, 2022

CROSSWORD PUZZLER

ACROSS

- 1 Frisk about quarters
5 Student's quarters
9 Nightwear
12 Therefore
13 Canal of song
14 Buscaglia or Tolstoy
15 River crosser
17 Ms. Hagen
18 Famous mummy
19 Avid
21 Reside
24 Red-ink item
26 Facile
27 Small bark
28 Two pounds, plus
32 Climber's challenge
33 Eggs, in biology
34 Good name, for short
35 Vegas alternative
37 Family mem.

DOWN

- 1 NBA official
2 Galena
3 Boss, briefly
4 Rather heavy
5 Sum owed
6 Gonzalez's gold
7 Narrow inlet
8 Rations out
9 Outlet insert
10 Leap in a tutu
11 Fly upward
16 "The King and I" name
20 Seek information
21 Pet name
22 Corduroy rib
23 "Monday Night Football" airer
24 Breathes
25 Iridescent gem
27 Long past
29 Baha'i origin
30 Strauss of jeans
31 Sheik's cartel
36 Paneling wood
38 Physician
40 Rocky projection
41 Maybes
42 Pour out violently
43 Remove the peel
44 Caesar's worst day
45 Actress Sedgwick
48 Fish without scales
49 Printemps month
50 Potato st.
51 Plane's stabilizer
52 To date

Answer to Previous Puzzle

Crossword grid with letters: SHED, SAWN, EGO, PALE, AREA, WED, ALMA, IT, SPEED, LADY, AR, TESTS, OLIVER, ORK, HECK, SAGE, NOIR, MER, MURK, IDLE, MEAD, LEE, CELERY, JETTY, WREST, IL, UTES, RAP, TACK, DOOR, YEA, YUKS, ETNA

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Crossword grid with numbers 1-58 indicating starting positions for clues.

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