

# RIDE THE HAUNTED ASTORIA TROLLEY THIS HALLOWEEN

By REBECCA SEDLAK

If you're in the mood for some spine-tingling stories this Halloween that have a local twist, the Astoria Riverfront Trolley's ninth annual Halloween Night Run is the event for you.

Taking place at 6 p.m. Monday, Oct. 31, costumed children, teenagers, parents and adults are invited to climb aboard at the Columbia River Maritime Museum for a one-hour ride up and down the Astoria Riverwalk.

"They decorate it really nicely with lots of spooky cobwebs and skeletons and monsters," says North Coast author and storyteller Melissa Eskue Ousley.

She'll be there too, for the second year in a row, entertaining the trolley riders with ghost stories.

"I kind of gathered the local legends to talk about as well as some classic ghost stories — the ones you read as a kid that kind of make you jump a little," Eskue Ousley says.

"We have such a rich history, and there's a lot of really old buildings that are rumored to be haunted," she says, citing Fort Stevens State Park and Astoria's Flavel House Museum and Liberty Theater.

Local legends on the docket may be familiar to some: Colossal Claude, the Columbia River's own river monster; Cannon Beach's Bandage Man, a phantom who appears in the back of people's cars; and Basket Woman, an ogress who kidnaps and eats people.

Astoria's own dark history plays into the inspiration for Eskue Ousley's stories. Once upon a time, the rainy little town's red-light district — with its brothels and rumors of sailors getting shanghaied — dealt in black market, sordid stuff. The huge fires that decimated the downtown, like the fire of 1922, also left ghostly remnants behind.

"I remember going out to Shively Park and seeing the columns there from the Weinhart-Astoria, which is the hotel that used to be where the Liberty Theater is now, and it's just really a surreal feeling when you go

there," Eskue Ousley says. "There's these two columns. There's no sign, nothing to explain them; they're just there. I think Astoria has a lot of those little pockets."

The Astoria Underground, too, has a dark magnetism. While doing research for her new young adult novel "Sunset Empire," which will be released in December and features a ghost, Eskue Ousley got the chance to go down into the Astoria Underground's maze of tunnels beneath the downtown.

"That was a very cool experience, very spooky," she says. "It's really kind of dangerous down there; there's a reason why people don't go down there."

"It's cool to think about all those tunnels and all the layers of Astoria, being built and rebuilt more than once," she continues. "I think it's one of those towns where it's got all these beautiful houses and buildings, but there's this really interesting, dark history too."

Eskue Ousley inherited her ghost story itch from her grandmother, who loved to be scared. "She would tell me ghost stories, and we would watch these really awful B movies together — getting buried alive, mummy's hands walking around by themselves," Eskue Ousley recalls.

She started reading Stephen King in sixth grade. "It's a lot of fun to read a suspenseful story and to kind of be scared out of your wits," she says. "I like stories with an edge to it. I like being scared. And horror itself, there's a lot of humor to it. Even though horror is kind of gory and psychologically scary, it also says something about humanity. It kind of makes light of death, which, I think, we all kind of have to come to terms with our fates. Sometimes things can be really campy,

## HALLOWEEN NIGHT RUN

6 p.m. Monday, Oct. 31

Columbia River Maritime Museum

1792 Marine Drive, Astoria

Weather dependent

847-921-7535

All ages

Free



PHOTO BY JOSHUA BESSEX

Costumed riders of all ages filled the spooky-fied Astoria Riverfront Trolley during last year's Halloween Night Run.

or you can find humor in those dark places."

Beyond the night's ghost stories and the candy for the kids (yes, the trolley conductors will have candy) is the opportunity to ride the Astoria Trolley in the dark.

"Most people don't really to get to ride the trolley at night," says Paul Winiarz, who has volunteered as a trolley conductor and motorman for four years and helps organize the event.

During the summer, the trolley runs from noon to 6 p.m. daily. Night runs, such as operating during the Pacific Northwest Brew Cup in late September, are rare.

"At night, the river and the city take on a whole new look. It's really pretty cool if you get the chance to ride the trolley at night," he says.

Eskue Ousley agrees. "At night, it's a different experience," she says. "They have the lights on in the trolley, but you can't totally see outside. You can see the ships out on the water, but because it's so dark, it kind of gives everything a spooky vibe."

The event, which is free, is a



PHOTO BY JOSHUA BESSEX

Local author Melissa Eskue Ousley will tell spooky stories about the North Coast as well as classic ghost stories during the Astoria Trolley's ninth annual Halloween Night Run on Monday, Oct. 31.

way for the Astoria Riverfront Trolley to say thank you to its local fans.

"It's our way, from the trolley standpoint, to give back to the community," says Winiarz. "We appreciate all the residents and business who are just so pro-trolley. Whenever they have visitors come to town, they say 'You have to ride the trolley.'"

A self-sustaining nonprofit,

the Astoria Riverfront Trolley runs off volunteers, its low fare of \$1, and donations, which will be accepted during the Night Run.

Built in 1913, the trolley is an antique, and for Eskue Ousley, it's also a great object of imagination.

"It's such a cool feature that we have in Astoria," she says. "It's this piece from the past that transports you — down the tracks but also emotionally."