

# In search of Tiny Tim and Betty Lou Who

Sometimes we all need a reminder of our holiday blessings

The calendar says, unmistakably, that Christmas is just over a week away, but I remain in denial. The holiday spirit has not possessed me yet this year.

That's not necessarily a new phenomenon for me. I used to be a pretty serious procrastinator, out with the masses on Christmas Eve doing most, if not all, of my holiday shopping. Living in larger communities helped cure me of that. I found I hated the last-minute shopping crowds even more than I hated shopping.

My daughter helped cure me of that too. For many years getting to see my daughter around Christmas meant traveling, so I would need to get my shopping done before I got on a plane. I also found enjoyment in shopping for her, especially if I had her Christmas wish list as a guide. If I knew what sort of things she would like, it would give me ideas and confidence to go off-book

for a few purchases.

But this year, like last, my daughter and I will be delaying our Christmas gift exchange until at least sometime in January. She works in the restaurant business and won't have much time off around the holidays, and the time she does have is already over-taxed.

So, knowing we won't be together around the holidays dampens my enthusiasm for the season.

The last nine months have blown past, like a tumbleweed propelled on a spring gust and obscured by the dust in its wake. It's been a year filled with change and transition. Job change, address change, house purchase, new pet, staff changes. As someone who is prone to be a creature of habit and routine to work most efficiently, I am at a loss to know what's normal now.

I want to just press pause and let my head catch up with the rest of me.

There's still time for Tiny Tim or Betty Lou Who to make an appearance and remind me of the spirit of the season and melt my Scrooge, Grinchy heart.

It's happened before. One of the more memorable times was in December

1986. I was in my third year of college at Oregon State, but I'd taken the fall quarter off to work as a photo intern for the East Oregonian.

The month started with the crash of a helicopter ambulance in the fog west of Pendleton, killing all three people on board, including paramedic Nancy Neerenberg of Hermiston. Four of us from the paper had joined the search party and reporters Chuck Westlund and Wil Phinney were the first to find the wreckage. As the son of a pilot, seeing the mangled aftermath of the crash affected me more profoundly than I cared to admit.

In the remaining days and weeks of my internship, I was moody and sul-

len. All the assignments I was sent on seemed trivial and insignificant. I didn't want to be there. I wasn't sure I even wanted to be a journalist anymore. It was surreal to me that people who made it their mission to save lives lost theirs so close to the holidays.

My Tiny Tim that year was a man by the name of Glenn Jones Jr.

Glenn was a kettle worker for The Salvation Army that season. In addition to raising money for The Salvation Army he raised the spirits of holiday shoppers by singing while he rang his bell.

In the days before Christmas, I was dispatched to get a photo of him and enough information for a copy block to accompany

the photo. I was not happy about the assignment and definitely not in the spirit. I grumbled all the way out the door and to the K-mart store where Glenn was singing and ringing away.

It was supposed to be a little holiday fluff photo and extended caption about a guy singing Christmas carols. That was, until I heard more of Glenn's story.

Glenn was a recovering addict who was working to rebuild his life and bringing a little joy to others while he did. He had three children, but hadn't seen them for two years.

"I like to sing especially to children because I can't be with my children," he told me.

Glenn was no saint, certainly. He had done plenty to damage himself and his relationships. Yet, he found

a way to seize upon the holiday spirit and share it with others. He certainly shared it with me.

He showed me I had plenty to be thankful for and celebrate that year. Sharing his story helped revive my passion for journalism, propelled me through holidays and sent me back to school determined to continue my pursuit of a career as a journalist.

Thanks, Big Glenn, for being my Tiny Tim.

And may we all have a blessed holiday season.

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Gary L. West  
SHADES  
OF GRAY

## Local Facebook posts about alleged threat worry parents

By JADE McDOWELL

Staff Writer

Social media fueled panic among parents in Hermiston late last week after rumors began swirling on Facebook and Twitter of an alleged threat to "shoot up" Hermiston High School.

But Briana Cortaberria, Hermiston School District communications officer, said an investigation by Hermiston Police Department confirmed that no such threat ever took place.

"Everything got blown out of proportion," she said.

Cortaberria said the rumors stemmed from a comment that a student overheard another student make to someone else following a physical altercation at the high school. Through a "game of telephone," she said, the rumor mill turned the comment into a threat about a school shooting.

"It was nothing like that," she said. "Nothing of that nature."

Once a student posted about the supposed threat on Facebook, however, people began calling the police department. Law enforcement worked with district administrators in tracking down the origin of the rumor and speaking to the student who had supposedly made the threat and those who heard what the student said.

Cortaberria said the school district wouldn't have opened its doors Friday morning if the administration or law enforcement had any concerns.

"Our first priority is student safety," she said.

However, a post on the district's Facebook page Thursday night, meant to calm parent fears, concerned some parents who hadn't heard of any possible threat.

The post, which appeared at 9 p.m. Thursday, said, "Hermiston High School administration has been made aware of an alleged threat. With the assistance of the Hermiston Police Department, the claim was confirmed to be false. There is no reason you should have concern in sending your student to school tomorrow."

It was shared 176 times and more than 200 comments were posted under-

*"There is a fine line of what can be shared for privacy reasons and with police matters."*

— Briana Cortaberria  
Hermiston School District  
communications officer

neath within a matter of hours. Many people asked for more information and wanted to know how the district could be sure there was no danger. Several parents said they would keep their children home from school.

Tracy Gammell was one of the parents who commented on the post Thursday night, asking the district to post more information after starting "a pretty big panic" among parents.

She said she ended up sending her children to school on Friday, but only after calling and talking to an administrator.

"I was concerned by the Facebook post from the district," she said. "I felt it was probably meant to calm people, but that it had the opposite effect and really startled parents because of the lack of information provided."

Cortaberria said at the time she and district administrators felt it was better to post something "short and sweet" to address rumors already swirling.

"There is a fine line of what can be shared for privacy reasons and with police matters," she said.

However, she did post an updated news release with more detail on Friday morning.

"In today's climate, this type of social media situation can be expected," the post read. "The positive side is that, had there been any merit to the claims, we would have been able to act accordingly and respond appropriately to ensure student, staff, and patron safety. Unfortunately, it can also work against us when the accusations made are false and unfounded."



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