

OUR VIEW

Rotten 2021 provides glimmers of hope for 2022

Looking back at 2021, we might be tempted to despair. Pandemic, civil unrest, insurrection and more were front and center in the news. While we were all suffering the fallout from global and national catastrophe, each of us dealt with the same things that have always troubled our lives — bills, work, family squabbles and so on. However, when we look closer into the events of the past year, we can have hope for the newly arrived year.

One thing from 2021 that we can be happy about is the mobilization to get people vaccinated. In our community, there were several people who worked tirelessly to vaccinate others against the coronavirus. Many of these people were in our community, at event booths, pop-up clinics and even workplaces. We have benefited from their service, and they were there for us.

We can also be glad for the work that

was started in 2021 that we will be able to enjoy in 2022. The new Hermiston City Hall is one of those projects. Located downtown, the old 1965 building lacked space and accessibility. Hermiston had outgrown that building, and the new one will offer us more.

As the roof has been recently added, and the walls are being filled in, we are getting a fuller look at the promise of the new city hall. It will be a symbol for Hermiston. It will show others the town is growing and is worthy of its place on the map. The people of Hermiston deserve to have such a structure, and we can be pleased to have it.

This is not the only construction that is happening, however, as work is being done throughout the area. To see this, we need only to drive through our neighborhoods and have a look around. We see new schools, new homes and new businesses

being built. These are places that we will come to fruition this year, thanks to the hard work of people in our community.

We can be thankful for the people who have made efforts to give us hope in 2021. Our local schools are filled with such people, who brought our children back into classrooms. Thanks to their work, they were able to teach students again.

And it is not just school staff who got the ball rolling on progressing our community; it was also the many other workers. Laborers kept our restaurants, stores and factories open and productive.

In 2021, the Hermiston Herald was filled with stories of people working to better our community — not just paid workers, but unpaid volunteers. These volunteers were behind big donation drives, such as Christmas Express. They provided for less fortunate people. Locally, charity efforts con-

tinued, fueled in part by organizations such as Lions, Kiwanis, Rotary and Altrusa groups.

Eastern Oregon Mission was also a big contributor to our area in 2021. Its work in 2021, in providing for people at Agape House and Martha's House, stood out. The efforts of their workers, paid and unpaid, provide hope that we can solve poverty in our community.

Our cities, like every city in the nation, remain beset with problems. Looking back at the stories of 2021, however, we are justified to be optimistic. Yes, overall, it was a wretched year. People died and livelihoods were crushed. Likely, the stories of the year will forever scar us. Still, there were many good things and great people who made news in 2021.

They give us hope for 2022.

ANOTHER VIEW

Home-schooling will boom long after COVID-19

Student enrollment in public schools has nosedived as parent disgust with school COVID-19 policies, student learning losses and controversial education policies has gone through the roof. In the wake of this enrollment implosion, home-schooling has boomed across the country.

At the beginning of the school year, the U.S. Department of Education estimated 1.5 million students had left the public schools since the coronavirus pandemic began.

If students are not enrolling in public schools, where are they going? The numbers show many former public school students are now being home-schooled.

The U.S. Census Bureau found the percentage of home-schooling households more than doubled in 2020 from 5% in spring to 11% in the fall.

According to a recent University of Michigan study, from 2020 to 2021, the enrollment at public schools in Michigan fell by nearly 46,000 students, which represented a more than a 3% drop. Among kindergartners, there was a decrease of more than 11%.

The increase in home-schoolers does not come from just a narrow segment of the American population. A University of Washington Bothell analysis found, "The diversity of home-schoolers in the U.S. mirrors the diversity of all students nationally," including all racial, religious, political, and income groups.

For instance, the Census Bureau found that among African American households the increase in home-schooling was much steeper than in the country as a whole, rising from 3% to 16%, a five-fold jump.

This increase in African American home-schooling is not surprising given recent research by McKinsey & Company that found "Students in majority Black schools ended the (2020-21 school) year with six months of unfinished learning."

Demetria Zinga, one of the country's top African American home-school YouTubers, says, "I believe home-schooling is growing and exploding amongst African Americans and there will be more and more home-schoolers."



Lance Izumi

Home-school mom Magda Gomez, an immigrant from Mexico, has become an activist for home-schooling in the Hispanic community.

She observes: "We Hispanics as a culture are usually very protective and loving towards our children. However, I explain that love is not enough to raise our children. We have to educate ourselves in different areas (of education), especially since we are not in our (native) country but are immigrants."

"It is my dream," she says, "to see more Hispanic families doing home-school." Her dream is coming true with home-schooling doubling among Hispanic households, from 6% to 12%.

In addition to the racial diversity of home-schoolers, in 2021 the school-choice organization EdChoice found: "Many parents of children with autism, ADHD, and other neuro-developmental disorders report that public schools cannot effectively address their child's specialized learning needs."

Pediatric nurse and home-school mom Jackie Nunes unenrolled her special-needs daughter from public school saying, "There just wasn't enough of the things that matter — time, attention, patience, persistence, passion, support."

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed all the flaws in the one-size-fits-all public schools, which is why the home-school boom is shaking up American education.

Lance Izumi is senior director of the Center for Education at the Pacific Research Institute.

PASTURES OF PLENTY

Transmuting moments of vulnerability into magic

I've been thinking recently about vulnerability. What it looks like, feels like, entails.

If vulnerability is the multiplier, what do we multiply it with, what is the product, the outcome of this action? Courage adjacent, vulnerability asks to shed light on the innermost workings of our hearts and mind and past. The process then is honesty and bravery in spite of the nagging, intrusive thoughts.

It's a realignment, for those of us who have fought against and lost many times over to the self-preservation instinct which tells us to harden ourselves against disappointment.

There is no guaranteed upshot. Only ripples. Ever-expanding. A seed buried in the cold hard earth. In 2009, I was 19. A sophomore English major whose identity was fully wrapped up in the brick-clad buildings of academia. Of American literature anthologies and annotations, of my column in the university newspaper, in booze-laden conversations only undergraduates have once they become equipped with the multisyllabic language of romanticism and philosophy.

Before then, existing on a college campus seemed beyond contemplation. Unobtainable. Freshman year had sputtered to a close, but my sophomore year held vast potential. A fog had lifted and in its stead, the sun, lionhearted and lemony, blossomed.

But in October of that year four incontrovertible lines, like Roman legions conquering Gaul, spread across the

planes of two pregnancy tests. I capped the tests and placed them gently in my pocket. It was raining that night and would continue to rain for some time.

That moment has been with me on repeat since its occurrence. Echoing in perpetuity. A constant companion.

The clarity with which I instantly understood my path still befuddles me to this day. My hand had been forced and I would deal with the repercussions as they came, but at that moment I knew what I would do despite the control which would soon be wrested from me.

I would keep my son because I could see him with such clarity that it seemed almost preternatural. Marrying this sense of fate with grief is a strange experience. Simultaneous blooming and wilting. Stranger still is purposefully walking forward with the understanding that a giant precipice nears, that soon you will be unable to halt the momentum, and that over the edge is all that lies ahead.

That fall, I moved back home to Eastern Oregon where I waited for my son to be born into the spring. I met him earthside in May 2010. He was round and perfect and had long strands of dark hair (those would later be spun to gold). I can still feel his cheeks squish beneath my lips like a mud-luscious puddle.

Accompanying me at this moment, however, was grief. Unimaginable, all-consuming, flailing, despairing grief. It shrouded everything it touched with a blackness

so complete that when I look back on that day nearly 12 years later, I feel heartbroken for that girl and her baby — alone in a sterile room, save the doctor and nurse. Moving forward despite the ground opening up and swallowing her whole. The breaking of the world and torrential rains — too much to bear now.

That rain, however, nourished the seedlings left behind by the rotten fruit — the grief, the sadness. I didn't understand the anatomy of a blossom then. Soon those seedlings would germinate and take root. They would twist and embrace and stretch and fill the hollow ground with hope and with gratitude. With love.

Why share this story? We are complicated creatures capable of holding simultaneous conflicting beliefs, emotions, wants, and needs. Accepting suffering as a gift is a radical act of vulnerability. So is arriving at the understanding that those complicated moments will irrevocably change us. Moments in time that you cannot undo, words that cannot be unsaid, emotions that can no longer be neglected. Stepping into that reality is terrifying but the alternative is scarier — a denial of self. I cannot change the past no more than an alchemist could translate mercury into gold. But I can transmute moments of vulnerability into magic.

We can plant the seeds and hope the fruit they bear is sweet.

Alex Hobbs is a former educator turned full-time homeschooling mom.



Alex Hobbs

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Donate to cultural nonprofits that matter to you

Twenty years ago, a mighty group of visionaries celebrated the fulfillment of a dream — a simple and effective way for Oregon taxpayers to direct funds to cultural activities. This was the genesis of the Oregon Cultural Trust and its cultural tax credit.

It remains cause for celebration. As the Oregon Cultural Trust marks its 20th anniversary, it has proven itself a stable source of funding for Oregon's arts, heritage and humanities nonprofits.

The state tax credit is available to any Oregonian who donates to one or more of the 1,500-plus cultural nonprofits and makes

a matching gift to the Cultural Trust. At tax time, the amount you gave to the trust comes back to you — dollar for dollar. And the state sets those funds aside for Cultural Trust grant awards the following year.

Since its founding in 2001, the trust has raised — through the cultural tax credit — more than \$74 million for culture statewide.

It has distributed nearly 10,000 grant awards totaling more than \$34 million and its permanent fund now exceeds \$33 million. In addition, the Cultural Trust network of County Cultural Coalitions enabled the distribution of more than \$25 million in Coronavirus Relief Fund for Cultural Support awards to 621 organizations struggling to survive the

pandemic. Please donate generously to the cultural nonprofits that matter to you — they need your help now more than ever — and use your power by making a matching donation to the Cultural Trust by Dec. 31.

Roberta Lavadour
Executive Director
Pendleton Center for the Arts

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