

OUR VIEW

# Hermiston's MLK march offers lessons in unity

At the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Peace March in Hermiston on Monday, Jan. 17, speakers repeatedly called out for unity. We share their request; we hope for people to come together and strive for a better world.

The event itself was a mixture of different people. The speaker's list included individuals of varied races and occupations. City government was represented with a speech by the Hermiston city manager, and local religious leaders spoke, too. Also, the attendees at the event were a rainbow of different races.

The diversity of the crowd was mentioned in one speech at the event. A speaker pointed out that there were many types of individuals in the attendance. In stating this point, the speaker said this was in line with King's message. King, the speaker said, would

approve of a unity made up of different parts.

Speaker Marlando Jordan, a Kennewick preacher, came to Hermiston to share his reflections on King. He praised the civil rights leader for his faith, vision, courage and loving heart. It was because of all these things, Jordan said, that King was able to have broad appeal. People unified behind the great man.

It is a shame that King, a victim of hate, is not with us. He would be in his 90s now, if he had not been assassinated when he was only 39 years old. We have people in our community now who started having birthdays before King, so it is easy to picture King with us.

In trying to make guesses as to what King would be saying to us, we listen to people at the Hermiston march and at other marches. Making their

points about a better world, speakers frequently quoted King. In advocating for progress, the speakers pushed for unity. And there were several ideas in the speeches are worth further consideration.

One point was that unity can be surprising. A partnership between The Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-day Saints and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, for instance, might not be the first collaboration people might imagine. Still, their cooperation has led to the advancement of humanitarian interests. Taking their example, we might also accomplish great ends.

Another point put forward at the march is that good things come from tireless work. A young speaker at the march told of how she is putting in an effort to educate others of our imperfect history and our potentially bright

future. King, her model, serves as an example for us all. We see how he worked hard in unity with others, and we try to act in similar fashion.

A third point, which was also mentioned in a speech, is that unity does not mean uniformity. We do not need to be the same; in fact, it is better that we are not all identical. The beauty of our community is that we have people who look, and sometimes think, differently.

All of this goes to say that there were a lot of valuable takeaways from the Jan. 17 event. We here at the Hermiston Herald are grateful to all the people who organized it and participated in it. For those who did not attend, we encourage you to make plans to be at the next one. You might also want to look out for the next event put on by the organizing organization, the Hermiston Cultural Awareness Coalition.

WRITERS ON THE RANGE

## A dangerous new predator stalks the West

The grizzly bear. The wolf. The cougar. These magnificent creatures, apex predators, how can we not admire them? People cross the world for the opportunity to see one in the wilds of Yellowstone or Alaska.

There, we view them from a distance, free to indulge our awe in safety. It has been a long time since Americans lived in fear of wild beasts.

But now that fear has returned. Fear felt not just in the woods, but also in cities and towns: Paradise, California; Talent; and now in Superior and Louisville in Colorado's Boulder County.

The dangerous predator we're facing these days is wildfire, charging even out of grasslands to destroy our homes. And no one is safe.

As an ecologist, I know that predators are essential to the health of wildlife communities, keeping prey populations in check. They're also a driving force in evolution, favoring the faster or stronger or smarter animals able to escape their attacks. Of course, civilization long ago freed us from the evolutionary pressure exerted by predators. But that freedom has come at a cost.

When populations and ecosystems grow badly out of balance, there must come a correction. Humans and the environments we have created are not immune to this rule, and we must recognize that we have unleashed the fire-predator through our own choices.

What choices? On the global scale, we have released vast amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

This was done at first in ignorance, but for at least the past 30 years, it truly was a choice made in the face of increasingly desperate warnings.

The resulting greenhouse effect has raised temperatures and decreased rain and snowpack throughout the West, contributing to "fire weather" like the hurricane-force winds that shockingly bore down on the suburbs of Denver in the dead of winter.

We also made land-management choices that strengthened the threat of fire. First, we behaved as if we could banish fire from the landscape, suppressing all wildland fires everywhere, and ending the use of prescribed fire in forests as a management tool. This led to a

huge build-up of flammable fuels.

Second, industrial-scale logging eliminated over 90% of fire-resistant old-growth forests and replaced them with highly flammable tree plantations. Finally, we vastly expanded our human footprint, building houses right where the fire-predator likes to roam, at the brink of forests and grasslands.

Reconciling ourselves to the depredations of wildfire requires that we take the long view. The fuel-choked forests resulting from our (mis)management need to burn, and they will burn. The best we can do is to preserve the old forests that remain and manage younger forests to increase their resilience to moderate-intensity fire. It could be a century or more before a new forestland equilibrium is reached, one with lower fuel loads, better adapted to the high fire-frequency climate we have created.

Meanwhile, what about us? Colorado's Marshall Fire proved that wildfire is the one predator we can't eliminate. Far from any forest, this was pushed through tinder-dry grasslands by howling winter winds and burned more than 1,000 suburban homes in a matter of hours. So, like any prey species, we must adapt as best we can. As

individuals, we can create defensible space around our homes. We can get skilled at escaping wildfire by having evacuation plans ready.

As a society, we can adopt sensible policies to limit development in fire-prone areas. Recent events prove that these include not just remote forestlands, but grasslands near suburbs. Faced with predators, animals try to get into the center of the herd. We need to do the same, avoiding exposure to the fire-predator at the vulnerable edge.

Finally, we can — we must — embark on an urgent global effort to end the burning of fossil fuels within the next few decades. If we do not, the West will face year-round fire weather, and a future at the mercy of fire.

Yet there is reason for hope: the human capacity for rapid social and cultural evolution. Let's harness that strength, and work toward the day when fire is a predator no more, but our powerful partner in the stewardship of the land.

*Pepper Trail is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, a nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. He is an ecologist in Ashland.*



Pepper Trail

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Recent Supreme Court ruling should change vote-by-mail system

I was intrigued by the recent Oregon Supreme Court ruling concerning the exclusion of inactive voters from being counted on petitions. In review of the opinion it stipulated that by statute inactive voters are prohibited from voting. Thus only active voter's signature will be counted. A voter is considered inactive if they have not voted in the last 10 years and have been notified by the county.

I think this ruling will/should have ramifications concerning Oregon's vote-by-mail system. Instead of sending out mass ballots to all registered voters, only active voters should be allowed to vote using the rationale of the court's ruling.

I am not a proponent of vote-by-mail. I am a firm believer in one person, one vote. I also think people should have to show some type of identification to vote. The United States is only one of a few countries in the world that do not require identification to vote. Given the importance of each election, it is critical to ensure voter integrity.

So, if you are in an inactive status your signature will not count on a petition, and the same should hold true to your ballot. If you are in an inactive status, all you have to do is contact the Oregon Driver and Motor Vehicle Services to be activated.

Some court rulings have unattended consequences, I think this one may and should change the vote-by-mail system in Oregon.

Joe Mesteth  
Hermiston

PASTURES OF PLENTY

## Art and creativity need not be forged in suffering

Growing up, I had never given the Beatles much thought. Like all good children being raised in corporate America, I had a tangential knowledge by way of advertisements. Nike and "Revolution." "Come Together" and luxury vehicles.

The songs were clipped and snipped and ready to sell stuff. It was not until I became a parent, fueled by the revulsion of technology, that I purchased a record player for my children. It seemed fitting that with their Union Jack-clad Victrola that a Beatles record should be spun first. The record was "Abbey Road." Less of a record and more of a launchpad.

It wasn't long after the needle

first descended onto vinyl that my sons began to show interest in creation, little fingers finding their way along keys of a piano in paths they've never before taken. I started to ask myself how is a person imbued with a desire to create?

What might the world be like if we were all given equal opportunity to fully explore the depths of art, to analyze the spark of human creation? If for a moment we were all

released from the expectations and standards of what we should be producing, what might blossom in the void?

In lieu of answers to these questions, I have only the Beatles. Specifically, the nine hours of footage compiled by Peter Jackson in his

documentary "Get Back."

What is most notable about the entirety of the documentary is an underlying sense of playfulness. A joyful abandon. In fact, it reminded me of my sons. This isn't necessarily equating "Let it Be" with whatever combination of notes my son puts together, but in the distillation process, you will find the same unbothered spirit. The same willingness to take risks, be silly, and lean into vulnerability.

We have a misconception that art and creation are predicated upon pain. There are certainly no shortages of this trope in our collective mindset. For example, I recently visited Portland where I took my children to see Beyond Van Gogh: an installation that attempts to change the narrative

surrounding the troubled painter. It was inspiring, but one left unable to isolate his art from his tragedy, his torture.

Author Ursula Le Guin said, "The trouble is that we have a bad habit, encouraged by pedants and sophisticates, of considering happiness as something rather stupid. Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting. This is the treason of the artist: a refusal to admit the banality of evil and the terrible boredom of pain."

If this isn't an invitation to frolic in strawberry fields, I don't know what is.

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Alex Hobbs



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