

Vacation offers respite from nation's angst

Folks love to remember the words of former Mayor Don Larson, who shaped the tone and tenor of Seaside during his long and productive time in city government. A “Don Larson meeting,” for example, is a city meeting run with efficiency and timeliness, without the baggage and verbiage some cities endure. I remember the former mayor commenting that although he loved Seaside’s events — Hood to Coast, the volleyball championship — the crowds here in Seaside set his vacation time in motion. I can relate.

After settling in Seaside this spring, I saw firsthand the transition the city takes when June turns the corner into July and visitors swell the city’s streets and fill the local eateries. A confluence of events — including the 90th birthday of my father — took me out of Seaside for my summer vacation, a vacation booked by national, local and planetary events.

I arrived in Saugatuck, Michigan, a little tourist town on the eastern side of Lake Michigan, as events in Charlottesville, Virginia, were unfolding. My father, a longtime civil rights activist, was surprisingly calm as we shuffled from the news channels — CNN, MSNBC, Fox — and watched the hate unfold, culminating in the violent death of Heather Heyer. I think I was more worked up about it — he a veteran of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963 and at the side of Martin Luther King Jr. again in Selma, Alabama, in 1965.

My father was immersed in a book on the French Revolution and as the latest words of our president wound up my internal coil of outrage, I was surprised by his relative calm. “People shouldn’t be surprised,” he said, only barely raising his eyes above the top of his book. “They knew what they were getting.”

After a bit of pique, I decided to follow his lead and enjoy the vacation, which with every political turn seemed to be more and more of a juggling act. My most recent Signal piece showcased Seaside’s newest entertainment venue, the Inverted Experience, subtly influencing me to feel that the world right now is somewhat upside down. Even the “beach book” I had chosen, “Submission,” by Michel Houellebecq, was painfully intense and profoundly political, a dark comedy about a world where the Muslim Brotherhood accede to power in contemporary France.

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX



I felt momentarily relieved — I had accomplished my mission. It hadn’t been easy but I had lost myself for a week and finally turned off the cable news.

Yet vacation time it was and time to soldier on. Fortunately, Saugatuck — a sort of amalgam of beach tourist communities from Cape Cod to Cannon Beach, with a heavy emphasis on week-enders from Chicago — offered the perfect respite, in fact, one of the local coffee bars in nearby Douglas was called Respite. Acclimating myself to humid summer clime for the first time since my debarquement on the Oregon Coast, I put down my double shot Americano and strolled the streets, bouncing from boutiques to sandwich joints and always looking for an authentic Chicago-style hot dog. I took a river boat with 80 of my new best friends up the Kalamazoo River to the mouth of Lake Michigan, drinking a Leinenkugel Lemon Shandy under the beating sun. I found a hot dog place in Holland, Michigan, that served the Chicago dogs, but these couldn’t hold a candle to Ruby’s in Seaside or Mudd Dogs in Manzanita. Dad had the TV tuned to the Detroit Tigers games; they were dropping a series to the Rangers. Apparently they’re not having much of a season.

I read the local paper, The Commercial Record, which was headlining a spat between the city government and the district fire chief over concerns from the that city officials were “subverting” his authority. In turn, officials responded: “There was no give and take on anything.” And world news kept seeping in as I lingered on the deck of the Uncom-

mon Coffee Roasters drinking Americanos and reading the Chicago Tribune and Grand Rapids Press.

As family began to arrive for a celebration of Dad’s 90th, I reconnected with John, an in-law and former suburban cop injured in the line of duty. He had been patrolling Highway 41 in Lake County, Illinois, and pulled over a suspect who attempted to flee. The suspect was apprehended but not without resistance; John was to face three back surgeries, and remains on disability. After my own running accident in May, I was familiar with the pain scale. I asked John what his pain level — a scale from one to 10, with 10 being the highest — was on a day-to-day basis. Was it a two? No, he said. Four? He shook his head. Six? He nodded. I couldn’t imagine living with that kind of pain on a daily basis. He blamed illegal immigrants and lax policy for his pain — the suspect had been an undocumented immigrant. The conversation stirred some complex if controlled discussion from other visitors, including family members Bill and Susie from Charlotte, North Carolina, who had lived through riots after the shooting of 20-year-old Keith Lamont Scott was killed by a city police officer. Both the victim and the officer were black. The shooting led to two nights of increasingly violent protest. Protesters threw rocks and bottles; police deployed tear gas. Three TV reporters were assaulted, one of whom ended up hospitalized.

As in Charlottesville, the narrative becomes increasingly clouded depending on what news channel you have on. Bill urged a more nuanced view than John but clearly no minds were going to be changed.

It was a good thing the television remained muted as we all gathered together to salute my dad. Among his guests was a 104-year-old woman: “And she came to visit me,” he later said sheepishly.

I closed up my visit with some St. Louis style baby back ribs at Smokey Bones Bar & Fire Grill before setting the alarm for 4:30 a.m. to board the Delta flight from Grand Rapids to Portland, with a layover in Minneapolis.

I felt momentarily relieved — I had accomplished my mission. It hadn’t been easy but I had lost myself for a week and finally turned off the cable news.

There was an eclipse here in Oregon, and with it, I knew, the sun would shine again.



EVE MARX/FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL

Writing at the coffee shop. Living in the sticks might not provide such amenities.

Not ready to live off the grid yet

“I came for the coffee,” Dave, a Gearhart friend, relayed. This Washington state native shared this information after making me an artisanal Americano at the shop called By The Way. At the time, I’d only been on the North Coast about three weeks and was doing the hard work of pinning down a range of coffee shops to write in.

As I write this, I am sitting in the window of the Seaside Coffee House. It’s midweek and fairly quiet. This coffee house is a neighborhood hub and there is a lot of talking going on. The mood is convivial. Michelle, the owner, knows all the regulars.

Doodling notes for this column, I’m reviewing a conversation I had last week with a friend. After just over three years, Nancy is ditching the area. I met her when she’d been here just a year. She’d moved from Austin to be closer to her son who works at Timberline. We met two years ago at an art event in Cannon Beach. I started talking to her because I admired her jewelry. When we got together last week, she was 24 hours away from her move to the Tygh Valley. Her son had married; a grandchild is on the way. The plan is a year or two of communal living; my friend will take care of the baby while the parents are working during the day. She will be doing the laundry and very likely a lot of the cleaning and the cooking. My friend is hugely looking forward to this great change in her life where she will be a modern pioneer. They will be raising chickens. They will be growing much of their own food.

“The goal is to get off the grid,” Nancy said. Sipping this excellent café au lait handcrafted for me by Michelle, I pondered my own interest or ability to live off the grid. I’m a person who is still mildly freaked that I have to go all the way to Astoria to get my shoes repaired. For me, the upside of living in this “remote” area is the easy availability of cleaned and cooked Dungeness crab. When my friend suggested her biggest concern about her move is low winter temps and frequent power outages and that her first purchase for their new communal home was a battery-operated generator, I thought, “You are a brave woman.” I wondered, ever so briefly, how she would keep up with her chic haircut and pretty pedicure.

Last night the husband and I went to see “Dunkirk” at the Seaside cinemas. The film takes place in 1940 as Germany advanced into France, trapping Allied troops on the beaches of Dunkirk. Under air and ground cover from British and French forces, troops were evacuated from the beach using every serviceable naval and civilian vessel. Driving home from the cinema, a substantial amount of our large buttered popcorn still in the bag, I thought how it would be much the same should there be a military battle here. Every fishing vessel would be deployed to lend a hand. It was a comforting thought, far more comforting than embarking on an off-the-grid adventure in the Tygh Valley without a talented barista anywhere near.

LETTERS

Plan deserves support

We are residents of south Seaside living on Holladay Drive and want to enthusiastically support urban renewal for many reasons. This is an area that has long been neglected and forgotten, particularly after the highway reconstruction had been defeated by a close vote 10 years ago.

Not only do we have just about the trashiest entrance to the city possible, but it is also an extremely unsafe area to live. Each day I witness walkers attempting to cross Highway 101 to shop, risking life and limb to do so as the only cross walks occur at Broadway and Avenue U.

If the “the big one” occurs and we should need to seek higher ground because of an impending tsunami, there are no bridges that would survive the earthquake. Now we have the opportunity to build new bridges and make our residents safer and secure.

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Finding family where you least expect it

There’s something special about small-town living.

That something special is a phenomenon I found myself defending when I made the decision to move to the Oregon Coast. I was halfway through my last quarter of college in Bellingham, Washington, when I took the job with the newspaper more than six months ago, and the announcement was usually met with either some jealous statement about an opportunity to live on the beach, or some form of this question:

“Why there? It’s so small. Do you have connections down there?”

They meant connections in a vague sense — professional, personal, familial or otherwise. Six months ago, my answer was “no.”

Deep down, I was nervous to leave all my friends and family for somewhere unknown. But then I would line up my defenses. I grew up in a small town, so I know what to expect. You connect with people stronger and more quickly, I would argue.

So what if there’s no big strip malls or large concert venues? So what if most of the bars and restaurants close by 10 p.m.? I had faith in having that small-town, family-like culture carry me through.

Turns out I was wrong. I did have a connection to the North Coast. It took me physically moving here to discover I had a whole branch of extended family I never knew existed. And I found my family through a series of conversations and connections that only a small town could provide.

For those of you reading and wonder-

LIFE AT THE BEACH
BRENNA VISSER



ing: yes, I am related to longtime North Coast residents Dan and Sharon Visser, and their kids Jennifer, Julie and Lori Visser.

I was first tipped off to their existence when sources would ask me if I went to Seaside High School, or if my name was Jennifer. Apparently we look similar. They would ask if I was one of the “local Vissers” in town, and each time I would answer that I wasn’t sure. After this happened five or six times, I decided to figure out who these “local Vissers” were to be able to answer these inquiries.

When I asked my parents about being related to someone named Jennifer, the answer was more or less “plausible.” The description sounded like the daughter of my dad’s cousin, but he wasn’t sure.

If at this point you are wondering how I could not be aware of an entire branch of my family, it may be worthy to note, I haven’t met a large portion of Vissers related to me because my grandfather’s generation had 10 siblings. Many live all over the country, and when each of those siblings have babies, and those babies have babies, the number of Vissers to keep track of starts to become quite the task.

Sorting it out

To sort the local connections out, I found one of my colleagues was a mu-

tual friend with Jennifer Visser. I sent her message saying I thought there was a chance we were related.

Around this same, an article about my arrival ran in The Daily Astorian, which listed the fact I grew up in Wenatchee, Washington, where a sizable portion of the “Visser clan” still live. Between Sharon reading the article and the timing of the Facebook message, dots were connected and before I knew it I had received an invitation to Easter dinner from my new-found family.

I showed up the next day with a bottle of wine and a lot of questions. We had 22 years to make up for, anyway. Over the course of dinner, we found that Dan was my dad’s cousin, and our grandfathers were twins. I left Easter with fewer questions and five new lovely people to call family.

Looking back, it’s uncanny to think of all the intersecting, moving parts that lead to this culmination of events. I often wonder if this situation had unfolded in a place like Los Angeles or New York would I have ever met this family.

One of my greatest fears moving here was the possibility of feeling lonely. But by moving here I not only was able to connect with biological family, but also with the tight-knit North Coast community that allowed me to find them in the first place. There is a lot of power in knowing your neighbor, and in small towns like this, a lot of impact.

And taking the energy to know your neighbor is what makes small-town living so special.

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PUBLISHER
David F. Pero

EDITOR
R.J. Marx

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Jeremy Feldman

ADVERTISING SALES
Brandy Stewart

PRODUCTION MANAGER
John D. Bruijn

SYSTEMS MANAGER
Carl Earl

STAFF WRITER
Brenna Visser

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Skyler Archibald
Rebecca Herren
Katherine Lacaze
Eve Marx
Esther Moberg
Jon Rahl

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