

War experiences, forestry work inspire Palmrose novel

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX



At 75, Ken Palmrose, who was born and raised in Seaside, is the author of “Out of the Blue: A Young Man’s Journey from the Palms of Vietnam to the Pine Forests of the West.”

Palmrose spoke with the Signal about his life in Seaside, writing and Vietnam.

‘Drafted into the Army and a 14-month veteran of the Vietnam War, he was glad to begin his career in a western national forest, but the dangers that he will face far surpass anything he has seen. Ben’s story is a journey, but also a reminder of the nightmares and daydreams of being in a war zone; some bad, some good, but memories that are forever lurking in the mind’s shadows.’

*Ken Palmrose
“Out of the Blue”*

Q: Tell us about your time in Seaside. Were you raised here?

A: My family has lived in the area since the early 1900s with Palmrose Dairy owned by my Finnish-immigrant grandmother and helped run by my father. My father and his brothers were well known athletes in their youth.

Our family was all over the Seaside/Astoria area. My parents lived in the area until their deaths and I still have one brother, Ernie, in the area. My family, children and grandchildren, have visited Seaside family

and friends quite often over the past 50 some years since I left.

I was born and raised in Seaside and graduated from Seaside Union High School in 1963 and then went to Clatsop Community College for an associate’s degree in forestry technology. I went to work for the U.S. Forest Service beginning in Eastern Oregon as a forestry aide, ending up 36 years later as the regional media officer for the U.S. Forest Service southwestern region.

Q: Have you always been a writer?
A: This is from my publisher’s publicity page: “Ken Palmrose, for many years during his Forest Service career, was a writer/editor and later was a contributing editor for an extensive Arizona wildfire story titled ‘The Monster Reared His Ugly Head.’ He has written numerous news and web stories, special feature articles and additionally is an accomplished photographer having traveled to over 25 countries around the world.”

So in one form or another the answer is yes, I have always been interested in writing. I was a writer/editor for six years, lots of forest plan-type documents. I was also a public affairs officer for 20 years.

Q: Did you serve in Vietnam, like the character in your book?

A: I was drafted within five months of starting my new career with the Forest Service and ended up after basic training going to military intelligence school at Fort Holabird, Maryland. Seems like they noticed I received good grades in photogrammetry at Clatsop Community College and I ended up being trained as an imagery interpreter, much of which I already studied.

I was assigned to the 519th MI battalion and we worked in an air-conditioned, secure building near Tan Son Nhut Air Base but were bussed every day from 6 kilometers southeast to our compound, which then was out at the far edge of the furthest reaches of rural Saigon.

We looked for the enemy on photos and infrared imagery and plotted bombing runs,



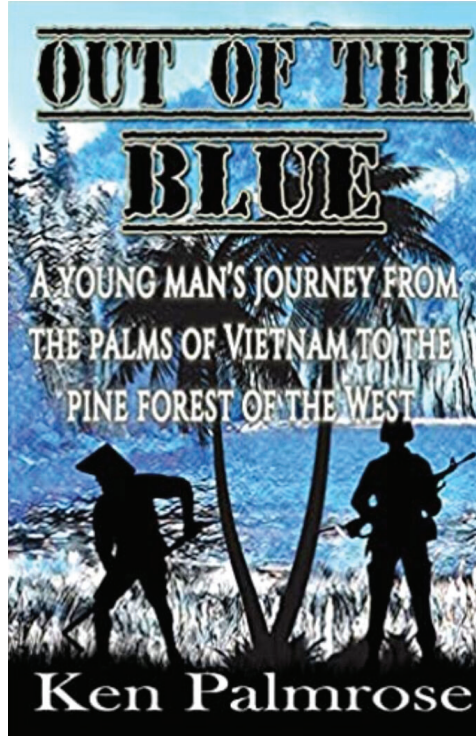
Author Ken Palmrose

B-52 missions, napalm strikes, you name it and other airstrikes. We also did tactical terrain studies to help our troops on the ground find ways to get safely cross country either on foot or in tracked vehicles.

I watched the air base get hit during the Tet offensive, while a few of us were sent up on the roof of the building for guard duty as the air base perimeter was only a couple hundred meters distant and was under constant attack in all areas. The May offensive — Ho Chi Minh’s birthday — was worse for us as much of the entire areas around our barracks and motor pool were destroyed, but for some reason, they didn’t hit our compound, which was only a few acres in size and held over 1,000 people.

Basically, it was a tale of two tours, seven months before Tet, we could go into Saigon and see the sights, eat and buy local, and seven months after Tet, the war was with us everyday from then on. I arrived in June of 1967 and left in August of 1968, 14 months.

Q: What’s the origin/concept of this book?



A: Originally I wanted to write a screenplay, nonfiction, but I decided I didn’t, at that time, have the patience. So, I started writing a novel based upon a crew of young men from all over the U.S. coming together in one of the most rural forest settings in the West.

As I was about halfway through, I started remembering things about my time in Vietnam and thought, why not fictionalize those as memories in the main character? So I rewrote the whole thing and that’s how it ended up. Fiction based loosely on some real events.

Q: Will you be back in the area in the near future?

A: I plan on being back in Seaside in September, as it is my understanding there is going to be some type of formal ceremony for the Vietnam veterans monument at the Cove.

Astoria police officer remembered as ‘over-the-top friendly guy’

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

An Astoria police officer died at home last Friday.

Sam Whisler, 26, had worked the graveyard shift and returned home early in the morning. His wife found him dead in the home later that day.

Astoria Police Chief Geoff Spalding said it appears Whisler died of natural causes, though the exact reason is still unknown. Family members say Whisler suffered from seizures as a child.

“It’s just a tremendous loss for the department and his family, and his law enforcement family,” Spalding said.

Whisler was an “over-the-top friendly guy,” the police chief said.

The youngest in a large family, Whisler was known for both his genuine kindness but also the pranks he liked to pull on older siblings.

From an early age, he felt drawn to a life in service. His father, Mark Whisler, worked for the Clatsop County Sheriff’s Office for decades, assigned for some time to the county’s narcotics task force. Others in his extended family had served in law enforcement and the military.

When he was 13, Sam Whisler started volunteering with the sheriff’s office search and rescue team.

He became an enforcement cadet with the sheriff’s office in 2013 and a reserve deputy in 2017. He joined the Astoria Police Department in January 2020. He was also a volunteer with the Gearhart Fire Department and a lifeguard and rescue swimmer for the Seaside Fire Department.

“We always knew he would wear a uniform,” his mother, Lisa Whisler, said.



Sam Whisler, shown with his family, died at his home last week.

“We just weren’t sure which one.”

Whisler himself didn’t seem to know. He thought about pursuing a career as a medic, firefighter or police officer.

He told his father, “I want to help people. I’m just not sure how yet.”

When the Astoria Police Department hired him, everything seemed to have come together for him: wife, kids, home and career.

“His life, in his eyes, was complete,” said Amanda Laird, his sister. “He had everything he wanted.”

Whisler and his father had brief conversations nearly every day while he was driving to work. They would talk about the previous day, the calls he had responded to as a police officer. It had become a conversation between peers.

With the hiring of Whisler and two other officers in the past year and a half, the Astoria Police Department was on its way to being at full strength with 17 sworn officers for the first time in years.

The department had lost officers to retirement or other job opportunities. All positive, normal things, Spalding said, but he and Deputy Chief Eric Halverson had just been talking about how

nice it was to be up to the department’s full strength.

Whisler was out of training and patrolling on his own by the end of last year. Though Whisler’s time with the department was brief, the community already loved him and his upbeat, positive personality, Spalding said.

A GoFundMe campaign Laird organized to help support Whisler’s wife, Christin, and the couple’s children hit its goal of \$10,000 within hours of launching. The campaign had raised just over \$20,000 as of Monday.

Christin called “Sammy” — her nickname for her husband — the most compassionate, nonjudgmental person she had ever met. She felt she could tell him anything, even her darkest thoughts.

“I knew I would just receive love,” she said. “No matter what I was saying, I just got back love.”

They would have been married two years this August and had one daughter together. Whisler was also a devoted and engaged stepfather for Christin’s 5-year-old son.

In the days since Sam Whisler died, Christin has considered if she wants to move away. She said she’s already dismissed the thought.

“To leave is to leave his memory,” she said.

She wants to stay in the home they shared, take a shower in the same bathroom, sleep in the same bedroom.

The loss is fresh. Many of the memories Sam Whisler’s family reach for are more sensory than story — simple, even mundane moments, as if his life has only paused.

Lisa Whisler thinks of his smiles, his hugs, his face, how he always loved to be home and around his family.

“Let’s stay home sweet home,” he used to tell her when he was very young.

She sees his eyes when she looks at his 2-year-old daughter’s face.

Christin thinks about the quiet weekends spent at home, just her and Sam and the kids hanging out in the backyard, doing nothing together.

“We could be sitting nowhere with nothing going on,” she said, “and we’d just have the best time.”

The memory Mark Whisler keeps thinking about is being at his son’s house and watching Sam walk down a hallway. He’s watching Sam at an angle from behind — “just looking at this young man, big and burly and friendly as can be” — as he’s walking away from him.

Whisler remembered in Seaside, Gearhart

Seaside Signal

greatly missed.”

The Gearhart Fire Department mourned the sudden passing of Astoria police officer Sam Whisler.

Whisler served as a firefighter with Gearhart Fire from 2011 until 2019 including three years as the department’s intern.

“He left to pursue his dream of becoming a law enforcement officer,” firefighters wrote in a statement.

“His dream became a reality in 2020 when he joined the Astoria Police Department as a full-time officer. Sam had a lasting impact on so many people affiliated with Gearhart Fire, and he will be

Whisler was remembered at Monday’s Seaside City Council meeting.

“I know Sam’s greatest ambition was to be a police officer, like his dad, which makes the pain for him even more severe,” Mayor Jay Barber said. “And so our thoughts and prayers are with that family. Such an outstanding young man and life cut short.”

Seaside Fire Chief Joey Daniels expressed condolences to the family. “Sam was also a lifeguard for several years and I worked with him, Gearhart Fire, so it’s personal. And I grew up with the family. We wish them the best.”



Sara Ford, David Rankin and Sam Whisler with Seaside’s beach rescue vehicle in 2016. The team saved a mother and daughter from rough surf.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Contact local agencies for latest meeting information and attendance guidelines.

TUESDAY, JULY 19

Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

TUESDAY, JULY 20

Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., work session, 989 Broadway.



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