

SignalViewpoints

Seaside lifeguard Spence's remarkable journey

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX



Swimming, rodeo, rugby — and a lifelong commitment to Native Americans and Indian heritage. All this from John Spence, a former Seaside lifeguard in the 1960s who shares the story of his remarkable life. “Crazy Wolf: A Half-Breed Story,” chronicles his impoverished childhood, road to education, fitness and recovery from alcoholism.

“I was just an average half-breed Indian kid on welfare, until I was 18 and completely on my own, having to make a living and go to school at the same time,” he writes in his newly released memoir.

Spence paid a visit to Seaside one year ago to research portions of the memoir. As a lifeguard on the Seaside beach, Spence was dubbed “Moon Doggie,” after James Darren, an actor in the beach movie “Gidget.”

From Seaside, Spence moved east and continued schooling at Rutgers University in New Jersey. He turned his focus on rugby with the same enthusiasm he had for aquatics. He later became president of the Portland Rugby Club and played in two national tournament games.

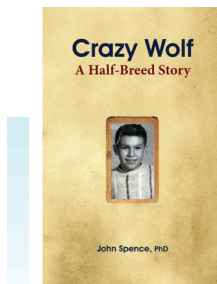
While his first marriage only lasted two years, after graduating with a degree in social work, Spence remarried. They raised a son and daughter in Beaverton, renting houses along the coast and maintaining their local connections.

Spence’s memoir, available online from SmashWords, shares his lifetime commitment to Indian welfare, social work and activism, working for many years with a low-income substance abuse program. The counselors “were the most tireless advocates for their clients that I’ve ever seen,” Spence writes.

In 1972, he went to work at Portland State University for their Indian Education Project.

Spence shares his battles with alcohol, what he describes as “a symptom of our indigenous sadness and loss, and the generational soul wound that is inescapable in our DNA. I was no exception from this destructive way of coping. Alcohol would eventually become my medicine to help alleviate the shame, fears and social anxiety that I lived with.”

Attending an Alcoholics Anonymous



RIGHT: Seaside lifeguards, 1964.
BELOW: John Spence rides on the beach in Pacific City.



Seaside's lifeguards are shown on the beach by the tower and jeep. From left, Peter Henniger of Portland, John Spence of Seaside and David G. Grimes of Portland. On the jeep hood is the mascot, Keel. (Signal photo)



John Spence recounted his days as a lifeguard in Seaside in the 1960s.

meeting in 1982, he was able to take the first step to recovery. He hasn't had a drink since, he writes, “moving full-tilt boogie into sobriety.”

As the tribal health planner at Fort Belknap, Spence worked his way to serving on the tribal council, selected to represent the Gros Ventre Tribe for more than a decade. He earned his doctoral degree from the University of Washington, researching learning variables among Indian undergraduate and graduate students to determine perceived success.

Sports remained a constant for Spence. As an All-Indian rodeo rider, he became accomplished enough to compete in the wild horse race event. When he aged out at 46, he adopted the sport of triathlon — running, bicycling and swimming.

His political activism remained high. In 2016, Spence was among 17,000 to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock. The next year he helped start the Pacific Northwest Council of Water Protectors, organizing against threats to clean

water and tribal sovereignty. “Before the late 1960s it usually just wasn't cool to be an Indian,” Spence writes. “However, I've witnessed a great rise in Indian self-pride during the past 60 years. This has contributed to a contemporary growth in tribal community self-governance and increasing economic and political power.”

“We have been healing as indigenous people in cultural renewal has been happening, this healing development, this healing movement is also evidenced by increasing resistance to harmful natural resource extraction, on our homelands. Standing Rock was the most recent dramatic incident to illustrate our growing empowerment.”

Spence lives in Beaverton, where he works part time with a horse therapy program for Indian children in treatment for substance abuse.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trust the science to eliminate COVID-19

Humans are at the top of the food chain. We have no natural predators. Except microscopic ones, like the coronavirus COVID-19.

Viruses are the ultimate parasite. They are smaller than a human cell. Their simplicity allows them to easily mutate and change to continue their existence, as evidenced by the delta variant. But they rely on a host (humans) to live and replicate. Viruses cannot live independent of their hosts.

We have found a way to conquer this predator, it is called a vaccine. A vaccine builds up the host's defense so the virus cannot effectively live and multiply within a vaccinated host. This results in the virus eventually dying off when it has no hosts left. That is what is referred to as herd immunity. If everyone works together and gets vaccinated, we can eliminate COVID-19. Trust the science.

Diane Wells
Seaside

pitals though, this year is frighteningly different. With COVID-19 infections on the rise and our hospital under enormous pressure from an ongoing staffing crisis, the Hood to Coast event fills many nurses and other staff with dread.

Each year, we see an increase in visits to the emergency room from car accidents, heat exhaustion, and injuries. This year, those visits could push us past the breaking point.

Not only will we see more visits to an already strained emergency room, but the event is also likely to increase infections among the participants! Yes, organizers of the event are implementing some “COVID protocols,” but the simple truth is this: it is beyond irresponsible for Providence to sponsor this event when it will have a devastating impact on the nurses and other health care staff who have been working tirelessly at Providence Seaside Hospital to protect our community.

Perhaps Providence should have used those sponsorship dollars to invest in nurse retention, hire more hospital support staff, or fund a public campaign to encourage people to wear masks and get vaccinated. As it stands, the Hood to Coast event isn't something Providence Seaside nurses are looking forward to this year. This year, we are scared. Providence, you should know better.

Mary Romanaggi, RN
Autumn Doss, RN
Providence Seaside Hospital

For safety's sake, Providence should rethink this year's Hood to Coast

In most years, residents welcome Hood to Coast participants with open arms and our famous Seaside hospitality. For front-line health care providers at Providence Seaside and Columbia Memorial hos-

AQUARIUM NEWS

Meet the delightfully dangerous nudibranch

SEASIDE AQUARIUM
WENDI AGALZOFF

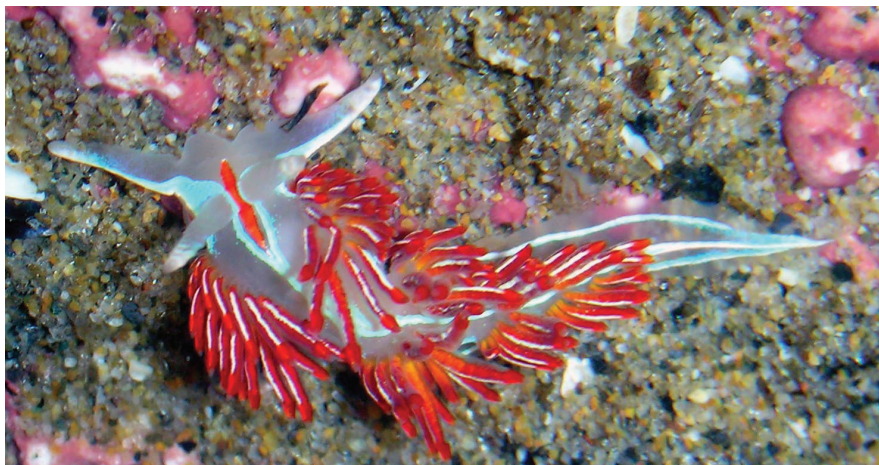


Mysterious, poisonous and beautiful nudibranchs are sliding around our coastal tide zones just waiting to be discovered. Two-hundred different species of nudibranchs call the Pacific Northwest ocean home while there are over 3,000 species worldwide.

Roughly translated, the name nudibranch means “naked gills.” After evolving from sea snails over millions of years, these sea slugs have gills on the outside of their body. A member of the mollusk family, nudibranchs come in a wide array of shapes, sizes and colors.

Some species use cryptic coloration to camouflage into our ecosystem of neutral color tones of gray, brown and sand. Many other species present the bold colors of the rainbow to warn predators of their toxicity.

The delightfully dangerous nudibranch has evolved using toxins as self-defense to protect their shell-less bodies. Some species are able to actively secrete chemicals such as sulfuric acid while other species of sea slugs are capable of absorbing the tox-



Tiffany Boothe/Seaside Aquarium

Be wary of the beautiful opalescent nudibranch. They can produce a painful sting.

ins of other creatures and using them to become poisonous.

An example of this kleptodermis system would be the nudibranchs ability to eat stinging cells from their prey (like corals, hydrozooids, anemones or jellyfish) transport them through their body and then become capable of stinging predators by storing the stinging cells on the exterior of the body.

Other slug species use this system to ingest toxic sponges and become toxic themselves.

So while the nudibranchs may look enticing with their glorious shapes and varying unique colorations, experts agree that people should not attempt

to touch or collect them. Toxic excretions can feel like a hornet sting and can result in allergic reactions or welt-like rashes. The animals are also fragile and easily harmed by even well-intentioned humans.

To view nudibranchs carefully and safely, the knowledgeable staff at the Haystack Rock Awareness Program can help navigate the sprawling tidepools at Haystack Rock in Cannon Beach.

Friendly folks at the Seaside Aquarium also may have endemic native species of nudibranchs to showcase for the public and answer additional questions about local sea life; 200 North Prom; 503-738-6211.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Contact local agencies for latest meeting information and attendance guidelines.

TUESDAY, AUG. 31

Gearhart City Council and Planning Commission, work session, 6:30 p.m., cityofgearhart.com.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 1

Gearhart City Council, 7 p.m., cityofgearhart.com.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 2

Seaside Parks Advisory Committee, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 7

Seaside Community Center Commission, 10 a.m., 1225 Avenue A.

Seaside Library Board of Directors, 4:30 p.m., 1131 Broadway St.

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

THURSDAY, SEPT. 9

Seaside Civic and Convention Center Commission, 5 p.m., 415 First Ave.

Gearhart Parks and Recreation Master Plan, public hearing, 6 p.m., www.cityof-gearhart.com.

MONDAY, SEPT. 13

Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., 989 Broadway, cityofseaside.us.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 15

Seaside Tourism Advisory Committee, 3 p.m., 989 Broadway.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 21

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

Broadway, cityofseaside.us.

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., seaside.k12.or.us/meetings.

MONDAY, SEPT. 27

Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., 989 Broadway, cityofseaside.us.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 28

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, 5:15 p.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center.

Seaside Airport Advisory Committee, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.



PUBLISHER
Kari Borgen

EDITOR
R.J. Marx

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Shannon Arlnt
ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER
Sarah Silver-Tecza

PRODUCTION MANAGER
John D. Bruijn
SYSTEMS MANAGER
Carl Earl

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Skyler Archibald
Joshua Heineman
Katherine Lacaze
Esther Moberg

Seaside Signal

The Seaside Signal is published every other week by EO Media Group, 1555 N. Roosevelt, Seaside, OR 97138. 503-738-5561 seasidejournal.com Copyright © 2021 Seaside Signal. Nothing can be reprinted or copied without consent of the owners.

Letter policy

The Seaside Signal welcomes letters to the editor. The deadline is noon Monday prior to publication. Letters must be 400 words or less and must be signed by the author and include a phone number for verification. We also request that submissions be limited to one letter per month. Send to 1555 N. Roosevelt Drive, Seaside, OR 97138, drop them off at 1555 N. Roosevelt Drive or fax to 503-738-9285, or email rmarx@seasidejournal.com

Subscriptions

Annually: \$51.00, monthly autopay is \$4.25
E-Edition only: \$4 a month

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Seaside Signal, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103. Postage Paid at Seaside, OR, 97138 and at additional mailing offices. Copyright © 2021 by the Seaside Signal. No portion of this newspaper may be reproduced without written permission. All rights reserved.