

**SignalViewpoints**

# A ruby holds a message of hope

**SEEN FROM SEASIDE**  
R.J. MARX



A ruby is helping Angela Fairless make sense of grief. After two tours of military duty and struggling with his war-related injuries, as well as the difficulty of reentering civilian life, her brother, Curtis Fairless, took his own life on Dec. 16, 2018. Angela Fairless and Lutheran Community Services Northwest will use proceeds from the sale of a ruby her brother purchased at an Afghan market to drive awareness to Afghan refugees seeking to settle in this country. She hopes her brother's memory will draw attention to the impacts of war, not only on civilians, but on the soldiers on the battlefield. "We don't hear the cries of the children dying of war," she said. "Curtis was struggling with his part in that. We see this with veterans of all wars. They start to recognize that they have more in common with the pawns on the other side than the generals on their own side."

**Military hero, yet struggling**  
Curtis Fairless was two years older and one grade higher than his sister, a good student and athlete who graduated before he was 18. He went directly into the U.S. Marine Corps after graduation from Seaside High School. After 9/11, he served on the front lines of the Iraq invasion as a mortarman in the infantry. When a rocket-propelled grenade hit the Humvee he was driving, he took shrapnel to the head and was transported to Kuwait. Since he was at the end of his tour, he finished out his last months in California before returning to Seaside.

"He was just trying to figure out what to do, and struggling," Fairless said. "He felt civilian life was just not for him. He gave up trying. He would say all the time, 'The only thing I know how to do is kill.' So he ended up going back into the military." He enlisted in the Oregon National Guard and served as a sergeant with American forces in Afghanistan. "He was trying to reassure me that I didn't need to worry, that somehow occupation with the Army National Guard is a lot safer than invasion with the Marine Corps," she said. "He was telling me, 'There's a Starbucks and I'm going shopping.'" He was in Afghanistan for about a year, but recurring injuries prevented him from joining his platoon on their next assignment in Africa. He returned home. "That was a hard blow," Fairless said. "He was just trying to figure out what to do and struggling." Her brother felt "weird" about his medals — a Purple Heart, a National Defense Service



Curtis Fairless and Angela Fairless.



Curtis Fairless on military duty.

Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, NATO Medal and more. "He felt like he didn't deserve them," she said. "We spent most of our lives feeling so extremely hopeless because of the economy and our efforts to be productive citizens. We did not have a good start. We were intelligent enough to be aware of why we struggled but not seemingly, at least in his regard, capable of overcoming it. Being aware that you have a mental health problem, does not fix it." In December 2018 Fairless was working at a restaurant in Astoria when she learned her brother had killed himself at a home owned by his aunt in Warrenton. "He didn't leave a note, but he did leave a message," she said. "And that message was a stack of books next to his head splattered

with his blood. The top book is 'On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society.' Oh, my God." **'Productive processing'** When Curtis Fairless returned home from Afghanistan, he brought rubies, jade and other gems bought at a market where he was stationed, intended as an investment for his family and loved ones. The gemstones were made into dog-tags for family and loved ones in his memory at the funeral. His sister kept one remaining ruby in her possession. She decided to tie the drawing to Veterans Day in her brother's honor because she sees an impact not only for Afghan people, but for America's military veterans trying to reenter society. The final ruby is a "productive process-

**HELP FOR EVACUEES**

Lutheran Community Services Northwest has been asked to resettle an estimated 550 emergency evacuees. They launched a \$2.5 million campaign to help refugees find stability in the Northwest. The number of Afghan refugees the agency is resettling in the greater Portland area is a moving target, Matt Misterek, communications director for Lutheran Community Services Northwest, said. "As of the end of the year, we're at more than 120 through our Portland office and another 75 in Vancouver, with more coming in the first few months of 2022." For more information on helping to resettle refugees arriving in the Northwest or to contribute to the campaign, visit <https://lcsnw.org/refugee-response/>.

ing" of her pain and reflects the kind of service member her brother wanted to be, she said. "His memory to me is one of self-sacrifice," she said. "He was also sending a message that we're doing it wrong — in regard to mental health, houselessness, foreign policy, literally almost everything. We've been doing it wrong, and we need help. And we are the only ones that can help ourselves. That's what his life said. But that's especially what his death said. "We look at the American soldier, and Marines in particular, as the strongest human being there is," she continued. "But he was just a sad, broken, abused little boy that was pimped out by our government and then not helped enough by his community." Fairless, a writer, organizer and youth advocate who ran unsuccessfully for Seaside mayor in 2014, lives in Rainier with her son, Ruben Saucedo. She is back in Portland finishing her bachelor's degree in science and social work with a minor in conflict resolution. The winner of the ruby drawing held in December was Lee James, of Coupeville, Washington, an Army veteran himself. "My wife and I will treasure the ruby," James wrote to Fairless. "Receiving it is like a sign that 'paying it forward' is truly the way. We are so blessed. The blessing wants to grow for others." With her support of the Afghan refugee effort, Fairless said she hopes people confront their internalized fear about immigrants — not just refugees. "I would suggest, I would hope, that the people of my hometown start to really ask themselves hard questions about themselves," she said. "Do I have any unconscious biases? 'Where are my blind spot biases?' 'Am I unintentionally racist and sexist and just don't know it?' "Is war a bigger problem that I should care about?' The answers are 'yes.'"

**OP-ED**

## Being a conduit for grace

**POEM**  
LIANNE THOMPSON



All that exists is created by our consciousness  
Expressed in words  
Song and prayer and plea  
Expressed in each of us  
Sharing with others  
An other  
Sharing, giving whatever we have in  
Brain  
Body  
Heart  
Soul  
Creating matter and energy with our consciousness, shared  
Shared with grace or greed or glum terror,  
We always share.  
We must always share, impelled  
By our indivisible relationship with  
Our selves  
God  
Each other  
Our good green Earth  
Let us speak joy to one another  
Let us flower our bliss by sharing it  
As a grain of a grain of grace  
Be love  
Be hope  
Be joy  
Be compassion to feel pain and failure,  
The heart of sin  
Which we transform  
By occurring, being conscious  
Of a grain of a grain  
Of grace.

**NEWS NOTES**

### 'Butterflies in the Garden' from garden club

The Sou'wester Garden Club will meet Wednesday, Jan. 26, from 10 a.m. to noon at the Bob Chisholm Community Center, located at 1225 Ave. A, Seaside. The subject is "Butterflies in the Garden," with Bob Pyle.

### Thai Me Up fundraiser benefits Sunset Pool, swimmers

On Saturday, Thai Me Up donated 100% of their sales at both the Astoria and Seaside restaurant locations to the Seaside High School swim team for the purchase of a timing system for swim meets and new diving blocks for the Sunset Pool.

### Prediabetes program at Columbia Memorial Hospital

Columbia Memorial Hospital's Diabetes Prevention Program starts Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022, and runs weekly on Tuesday evenings from 5 to 6 p.m. This program is CDC-recognized and based on research. It is focused on healthy eating and physical activity. Eligible participants have been diagnosed with prediabetes based on a blood test completed in the last year, are a woman and have been diagnosed with gestational diabetes during pregnancy, or have a positive screening for prediabetes based on the CDC prediabetes screening test. This lifestyle-change program will be offered in-person in CMH's Coho Room, second floor, 2021 Marine Dr., Astoria. Contact Arna Vanebo Pyle, registered/licensed dietitian, with any questions at 503-338-7592. Information can also be found at [columbiamemorial.org/dpp](http://columbiamemorial.org/dpp).

**PUBLIC MEETINGS**

Contact local agencies for latest meeting information and attendance guidelines.  
**TUESDAY, JAN. 18**  
Seaside Planning Commission, work session, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

ond floor, 2021 Marine Dr., Astoria. Contact Arna Vanebo Pyle, registered/licensed dietitian, with any questions at 503-338-7592. Information can also be found at [columbiamemorial.org/dpp](http://columbiamemorial.org/dpp).

### Budget committee members sought for transportation district

The Sunset Empire Transportation District Board of Commissioners is seeking volunteers from Clatsop County who are registered voters and would like to serve on the Budget Committee. The committee is comprised of seven district board members and seven community members who are appointed by the Board of Commissioners and serve a three-year term. There are currently five community member positions open on the committee with one being a two-year fulfillment of a three-year term. Generally, the Budget Committee meets once each year in the spring, but they may hold additional meetings if needed. It is anticipated that the committee will meet virtually via Zoom in 2022. Those interested in serving are asked to submit a letter of interest which can be emailed to [jeff@ridethebus.org](mailto:jeff@ridethebus.org), dropped off at the Astoria Transit Center, 900 Marine Drive; Seaside Transit Office, 39 North Holladay; or mailed to Sunset Empire Transportation District, 900 Marine Drive, Astoria, OR 97103. Submit letters of interest by Jan. 31. For more information, contact Jeff Hazen, the executive director, at 503-861-5399 or by email at [jeff@ridethebus.org](mailto:jeff@ridethebus.org).

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

### Put livability above profits

I am urging the city of Seaside to institute a moratorium on vacation rental dwelling permits before we lose more neighborhoods. I have lived at 510 13th Ave. since 1997. When I first moved here my street was a mix of five or six full-time families, vacation homes, a bread and breakfast, and a few vacation rentals. Now there are only two full-time residents on the street, myself and the family running the bread and breakfast, and a couple of vacation homes — all the rest are now VRDs. Five new homes have been built across the street from me, three are already being ran as VRDs, one of the other two just sold and the owner told me yesterday they plan on using it as a VRD. So instead of the neighborhood that was here when I first moved to Seaside, I now live in a commercial vacation zone surrounded by strangers who could care less if they're staying in a neighborhood — they are here on vacation, to have fun, no matter if their noise and parking interferes with the livability of the people who live here full time. There is a nation wide crisis of affordable housing. VRDs help fuel the higher cost of housing. For a local example, one of the few long term rentals on 14th Avenue is one of the applications in the rush of VRD applications after the talk, but no action, of a moratorium last month at City meetings. Municipalities all over the country are looking at this issue. It is time for Seaside to take action. A moratorium would give the city time to study the issue and come up with a plan that puts the livability of our neighborhoods over the profits of VRDs.  
**Joyce Hunt Seaside**

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PUBLISHER Kari Borgen | EDITOR R.J. Marx

**CIRCULATION MANAGER** Shannon Arlnt  
**ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER** Sarah Silver-Tecza  
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**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS** Skyler Archibald, Joshua Heineman, Katherine Lacaze, Esther Moberg  
**CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER** Jeff TerHar

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