

Walugans Like Ourselves

By Brian Doyle

It was the twentieth century after the thin Jewish mystic named Yesuah was born when I arrived in the area that the Atfilati Kalapuya people who lived here for thousands of years called Waluga, the place of swans; and now it is deep into the 21st century, and I am aged, and my time is upon me, and while I have the most fervent and eager hope that I will get another life as perhaps an otter or an osprey, or a small left-handed child who turns out to be a genius on the fiddle, I am not sure of that, and I may well be headed to a career as the most excellent and generous compost for summer tomatoes, which would not be a bad fate, not at all; we do wish to remain useful even after our expiration date, do we not? But before I go I will sing the things that I thought best and most characteristic of this place and its people, things that have remained our essence:

We did not care overmuch here about money and social status, or about shiny possessions, be they mansions or automobiles, but did in the main look out for the least among us, those bruised and broken and hammered by the blows of life; and so we set aside places for them to live, because we understood at a deep level that they were us and we were them, and that each of us, no matter how wealthy and lucky and arrogant about our wit and wile, was an accident or a disease or a careless mistake away from penury ourselves; and so many among us collected food and clothing and money for the bruised among us, and did what we could to ameliorate their pain and despair, and this had nothing to do with government and politics and religions and regulations and laws, but everything to do with what we expected of Walugans like ourselves.

We *did* care greatly about the places we held in common as valuable beyond measure, so that our library, schools, water quality, public safety, air quality, and environmentally reverent development of our land never wanted for money, and indeed, as you know, the library calved not once but twice, such that we now have four libraries, one for each quadrant of the city, and each as busy as the original one in the First Addition, long ago renamed The Cyndie Glazer Story Factory, in honor of that interesting soul, queen of the Lake Oswego Reads program, still the finest and most creative and energetic in America.

And finally we did, more than any other city I know, realize how crucial and powerful and holy and nutritious stories are, and how good stories are the ways that culture is carried and transmitted and shared among us, and so we started our Story Net, with written and spoken and sung stories, and that Net became part of the school curricula here, and a steady series at the library, with story events at the police station and the firehouse and the city council meetings, and churches and temples and stupas also host Net programs, and theaters and pubs and grocery stores and the booming farmers' market, and we have become rightfully renowned, it seems to me, as a city where story is the thing we share and relish most here, as well as civility, and laughter, and clean water, and Mayor Kevin Love.

But you know all this, and in the little time remaining to me I would like to devote more time to studying the osprey that I might turn out to be; and so my thanks, and all best wishes,

Brian Doyle

Brian Doyle is an award-winning author, essayist, and editor of the University of Portland's PortlandMagazine. He lives in Lake Oswego where his book "Mink River" was the Lake Oswego Reads selection in 2012.