

A Spring Walk in Lake Oswego

by Mary Ratcliff

Kraauk! The Great Blue Heron lifted its lanky body into the air and floated up to the top of the Oak tree. I stopped to gaze upon the beautiful breeding plumage of the stately bird from the path in Foothill Park. I was making my annual spring hike from along the Willamette River to the Iron Mountain trailhead at Andrews Road where I then planned to descend into the canyon to the bridge over Tryon Creek. I reflected on how fortunate I am to live in Lake Oswego in this year of 2050. So much has changed since 2000 when my mom moved to the 1st Addition with my grandparents. I've looked at the photos of downtown Lake Oswego from that time before the Lake View Village, the public parks and Headlee Walkway along the lake were developed and it was such a different place. How lucky we are to have such a beautiful waterfront park on the lake. Not only is the lakefront open to the public, but Millennial Plaza Park overlooking the lake is an essential heart of our community with the Saturday Farmers Market and community events allowing us to come together. My mom remembers going to the Movies in the Park with her folks, just like she and my dad took me when I was just a kid. Lake Oswego was an idyllic place to grow up.

But even with the development of the downtown and revitalization of the city, the city faced some daunting challenges; in particular, people became aware that climate change would create significant problems for our community: droughts, extreme rain events, and rising seas. In the teens of the century my grandparents and their friends started to nudge the city and community to become net-zero - advocating that all our energy needs should be met by renewable energy, even transportation. They started with some simple and obvious approaches: recommendations for changing streetlights to LEDs which resulted in significant savings for the city and also changing to LED lights in their homes and their churches. They worked with the business community and schools to find how they could also take advantages of energy savings. When they found they and many other neighbors could not install solar panels on their homes (because their beautiful trees cast too much shade), they joined with others to create community solar gardens throughout the city. My grandparents bought an electric car and hooked it up to their neighborhood community solar garden. They knew that one of the keys to achieving a net-zero community was by focusing on energy efficiency and by electrifying transportation so it too could run on renewable energy.



That was a time of significant transformation in the energy market. The cost for solar energy had dropped lower than other non-renewable sources in many parts of the world and was expected to drop rapidly for the foreseeable future. Storage technology for solar and wind were just becoming viable with more advances coming fast, and the ability to create distributed energy hubs meant that the city could design in resilience for disasters such as a potential 9.0 earthquake. My grandparents along with their network strived to help the city and community cross the bridge to a net-zero future well before 2050. I am especially proud that their efforts inspired other communities around the country and around the world to take similar steps. Because of all their efforts, the global community was able to hold global temperature rise to less than 2 degrees centigrade thus providing an escape path to a livable future.



As I walked along, the soft “smew” of a hidden Spotted Towhee had me peering deep into the thicket until I spotted the bright red eye of the bird. Walking through the neighborhood, everywhere I look, I see homes landscaped with native plants, well-designed rain gardens and majestic trees. I look at photos from the past, and the ivy-shrouded trees along Hwy 43 and SW Terwilliger Blvd seemed to be suffocating. Who could have known that the community would have cared enough to rescue the trees and our landscapes

from their prison? The story of Lake Oswego is that thousands of volunteers - neighbors, friends, students, church groups - came together to work on freeing the trees, removing invasive species and planting natives. Today, ivy invasions have been fought back, other invasive plants have been subdued and healthy native plants have refilled our neighborhoods, our public spaces, and our parks. As a result, our creeks and watersheds are healthy and the water we pass onto the Willamette River is clean. Our yards, parks and natural areas have abundant wildlife, healthy pollinators, other beneficial insects, and, boy, the birds sure sing up a storm. I love that when I go into Tryon Creek State Park, I find tracks of coyote, see nesting owls and ravens and hear the melodious Pacific Wrens. People today can connect to nature just by going for a walk.

But nothing makes living in Lake Oswego better today than the sense of community that came out of Oswegoans working together to meet the challenges of addressing climate change and for building a sustainable city – a city that will provide a healthy, connected and caring community for generations to come. We know our neighbors, we’ve built ties across our community that makes sure no one is left to struggle on their own, we’re able to step up when needed, and we care about each other. Our community still has conflict where not everyone agrees, but we’ve learned how to resolve our disagreements through thoughtful and respectful dialogue.



Crossing the Iron Mountain trail bridge and starting the trek up the hill to finish my loop, I realize I’m looking forward to raising my children in this wonderful community just like my grandparents and my parents did. And I’m looking forward to seeing how we solve today’s problems and hope to make our children and grandchildren proud of what we’ve accomplished too.

Mary Ratcliff is a retired software engineer and manager who has made Lake Oswego her home since 2001. Her passion for nature leads her to volunteer for the Audubon Society of Portland, the Oswego Lake Watershed Council and both the Lake Oswego Sustainability Network and the Lake Oswego Sustainability Advisory Board.