



**NEWS FROM
RAIN
SHADOW
COUNTRY**

TIM WHEELER

Tim Wheeler OCT '05

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FORWARD	III
PREFACE	1
WE MOVE A 1929 HOUSE, LIVE IN IT	3
[1] IN THE BEGINNING	9
BORN IN ONE WASHINGTON, MOVE WEST TO THE OTHER	11
[2] GROWING UP IN THE OLYMPIC RAIN SHADOW: MEMORIES OF MY YOUTH	19
THE FLAGBEARER	21
WE BUY THE OLD BELL HILL FARM AND MILK COWS FOR A LIVING	23
BONNIE & DAISY: THE TEAM THAT PULLED UNTIL THEY COULDN'T	28
WE LEARN TO FARM AND FIND SOLACE IN BOOKS	30
MOTHER COURAGE OF CLALLAM COUNTY	35
GREAT FORKS FIRE OF 1951	38
I HEAR PAUL ROBESON SING, MY WORLD BEGINS TO CHANGE	38
ROBESON: "THAT SIGHT AND THAT SONG . . ."	43
AFTER ROBESON, THE VOICES OF EARL ROBINSON, PETE SEEGER RING OUT IN CLALLAM COUNTY	45
MAYBE & MAY: LIFE AND DEATH ON A FAMILY FARM	47
MY COLDEST WINTER	50
MARY BROWN SEQUIM'S PERENNIAL POSTMASTER	55
FOUR CRAZY TEENS NEARLY MAKE IT TO THE LIGHTHOUSE	59
HONOR AT SEQUIM HIGH	61
SUSAN AND HER MARE, TRUMPET	64
75 HOUR BUS RIDE TO FREEDOM	68
TOPPING THE TALLEST TREE	70
FRED BOOTH'S MIGHTY KICK	74
REMEMBERING A TOWN WIPED FROM THE MAP	77
[3] COLLEGE DAYS	81
SWINGING BIRCHES IN AMHERST	83

SINGING IN THE SHOWER	85
HITCHHIKING IN ALZADA	87
BENJAMIN J. DAVIS, JR. RETURNS TO AMHERST COLLEGE. . . . AND JARVIS TYNER VISITS TOO	96
THEY SHALL NOT PASS: FIGHTING FASCISM IN 1930S BRITAIN	101
I REMEMBER TED KENNEDY	103
I AM FOUND “MORALLY UNFIT”	105
THE GREEN GEYSER OF DUNGENESS	110
WE HOST BARACK OBAMA (THE ELDER)	113
PLOTTING TO DEFEND FREE SPEECH AT THE “BLUE MOON”	116
SEATTLE 1962: “RISING HOPES FOR PEACE”	120
I WED A GAL WHO DANCES THE HORNPIPE	125
PETE SEEGER: STANDING TALL AT 85	129
NOT MERELY A TEENAGE CRUSH	132
[4] WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE?	135
GREAT GRANDFATHER FOUGHT TO END SLAVERY AND SAVE A NATION	137
A MARINE ON HIS WAY TO WAR	142
SERGEANT PROVOST MISSED HIS DAUGHTER	143
THE SOLDIER WHO FOUGHT WITH ONE SHOE ON, ONE SHOE OFF	145
[5] BACK IN MY HOMETOWN, STILL COVERING THE NEWS	149
ASIAN AMERICAN WORKER STRUGGLES (FOR ASIAN-AMERICAN WORKERS, THERE ARE NO BORDERS)	151
BUMPER CROPS IN A WORLD FACING FAMINE	156
15,000 CHEER BERNIE SANDERS IN SEATTLE	159
PORT WORKERS SPEND LABOR DAY ON PICKET LINE	162
KAISER STRIKERS: ‘SAVE JOBS, ENVIRONMENT’; SPOKANE LABOR LEADER RUNS FOR CONGRESS	165
HERO OF LABOR, WILL PARRY, CELEBRATES 90TH BIRTHDAY	169
YOUTH ORGANIZE MARCH AGAINST POLICE KILLINGS	171
CANADIAN TOWN HOSTS CONFERENCE ON UTOPIAN SOCIALIST COLONIES	173
WHY SO LITTLE REPORTING ON BOMB THREAT IN SPOKANE?	176
HOMETOWN TO GLENN BECK: THIS IS A HATE-FREE ZONE	178

[6] ONE TOUCH OF NATURE	181
“WOMEN OF COURAGE” HONORS HAZEL WOLF, HATTIE MCDANIEL, EVERYWOMAN	183
DIGGING FOR GOLD IN THE COLORADO ROCKIES	186
WILDERNESS LOVERS ASK: WHY BRING A GUN TO A NATIONAL PARK?	190
TRIBE’S HOPES SOAR AS ELWHA DAMS COME DOWN AND SALMON RETURN	193
NAVY JET NOISE, ELECTRONIC WARFARE STIR OUTRAGE	196
EXXON VALDEZ: THE SPILL THAT WAITED TO HAPPEN	198
KAYAKERS PADDLE IN SEATTLE PORT CHANTING “SHELL NO”	201
[7] BRING DOWN THAT WALL!	205
TOWN ASKS OBAMA TO HALT BORDER PATROL RAIDS	207
BORDER PATROL ROADBLOCKS SPREAD FEAR ON U.S. 101	209
PROTESTS FORCE END TO ICE-BORDER PATROL CHECKPOINTS	211
[8] FIGHTING FOR JOBS, UNION RIGHTS	215
DEPRESSION ERA JOBS PROGRAM IS MODEL FOR TODAY	217
2,000 RALLY FOR UNION RIGHTS US CANADA BORDER	221
HOW A SMALL TOWN COUNCIL ROUTED THE UNION BUSTERS	224
PAPERWORKERS END STRIKE, RESUME TALKS WITH NIPPON	227
WALMART WORKERS STRIKE ON BLACK FRIDAY	229
WOODY GUTHRIE, SONGWRITER AND <i>PEOPLE’S WORLD</i> COLUMNIST, SINGS AGAIN	232
[9] NATIVE AMERICANS CELEBRATE THEIR CULTURE AND SOVEREIGNTY	237
CORPORATE THREAT TO THE QUILEUTE INDIANS	239
AMERICAN INDIANS PULL WITH PRIDE IN ELWHA	245
REMEMBERING TSE-WHIT-ZEN VILLAGE	247
MAKAH DEFEND TREATY RIGHTS	251
[10] COMING FULL CIRCLE	257
STORYTELLER TO SHARE TALES OF DUNGENESS VALLEY DURING TUESDAY’S STORY SWAP IN PORT ANGELES	259
THE OBAMA COALITION: THE WINNING MAJORITY	262

Tim Wheeler

AS DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION OPENS, THOUSANDS MARCH FOR CLEAN ENERGY	267
WASHINGTON STATE VOTERS APPROVE WAGE HIKE, SEND JAYAPAL TO CONGRESS	269
A TIME TO STAND AND FIGHT!	272
NO FARMS, NO FOOD: WARD-WHEELER FARM WILL STAY FARMLAND FOREVER!	280
INDEX	285
ENJOY LIFE! KEEP ON READING!	293

We Host Barack Obama (the Elder)

Slightly altered from story printed in the *Sequim Gazette* (Story first appeared in *The Ditchwalker*, newsletter of the Sequim High School Alumni Association) August 3, 2014

SEQUIM, WASHINGTON—I had gone back to the University of Washington in the spring of 1961. By then I was courting Joyce Provost who was to become my future wife.

I ran into Muga Ndenga hurrying across the Quad. He was the exchange student from Kenya who had suffered such grief from the eruptions of our infernal manure pump when he visited our farm a few weeks earlier. He was fully recovered from that tragedy.

“Tim,” Muga exclaimed. “It’s so good to see you. I enjoyed the visit to your farm soooo much! Is there any chance I can come back for a second visit?”

“Of course, Muga. You’re welcome to come anytime you like.”

“Is it O.K. if I bring my best friend? He too is an exchange student from Kenya. He has a big, fast car. I think it’s a Buick. We could all ride up to your farm together.”

“That’s a great idea, Muga. What’s his name?”

“Barack Obama.”

And indeed we did ride in Barack Obama’s Buick. He was sitting in the front seat with his girlfriend and another woman classmate. Joyce, Muga and I sat in the back seat—frozen in white-knuckle terror.

Obama drove at eighty or ninety miles-an-hour on the twisting curves of Old Olympic Highway. We were convinced we all would die. We made it safely to our other handsome farmhouse, the Bell House up on Bell Hill.

Obama slept in one of the upstairs bedrooms. Next morning, we drove down to our new farm along the west bank of the Dungeness River. I took Muga, Obama, his girlfriend, the other young woman, and Joyce on the Cooke’s Tour of our State-of-the-Art dairy farm. I sized Obama up: slim, dark-complexioned, strikingly handsome, courteous and soft-spoken. Like Muga, he spoke the “King’s English.”

He was dressed in a cashmere sweater, neatly creased chinos and a pair of Gucci loafers. He looked like he had just stepped out of the pages of one of those fashion magazines. I decided then to remove from the tour a demonstration of the wonders of our manure pump.

He died years later in a fiery auto accident in Kenya—but not before he fathered a son.

Over four decades later, I was sitting at our breakfast table in Baltimore reading the morning paper.

“Listen to this, Joyce,” I said. “Some guy named Barack Obama is running for the U.S. Senate from Illinois. That can’t be the Barack Obama we know can it? This guy is far too young.”

Joyce and I mulled it over. Maybe Barack Obama was a commonplace name in Swahili, like Smith. A bit more research made it clear: The Barack Obama in Illinois was the son of the man we had hosted in Sequim. The son won a landslide victory in Illinois capturing seventy percent of the vote in winning a seat in the U.S. Senate in 2004.

Four year later, Senator Barack Obama was a candidate for President of the United States. Joyce and I worked hard in Maryland to help Obama carry that state. At the time, we were dividing our time between our home in Baltimore and our home in Sequim. I covered Obama’s campaign writing many articles in the *PW* about his victories.

I remember with pride riding the Maryland Black Caucus bus down to Columbia, South Carolina to campaign for Obama in the spring of 2008. I also went door to door for him in Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Oregon, and Washington State.

Clallam County, Washington, where we now live, is a swing district. George W. Bush carried Clallam County, narrowly, in 2000 and 2004. Obama carried the county narrowly in both 2008 and 2012. We think our diligent work was a factor in his victory.

We organized street corner “waves” in Sequim and Port Angeles in 2008. Four years later, I marched with the Democrats in the Irrigation Festival Parade in Sequim and the

Fourth of July parades in Forks and Port Angeles holding up a giant sign that I had lettered, "OBAMA: FOUR MORE YEARS!" We got resounding applause and cheers in all these parades from the crowds that lined the parade routes.

The last weekend of the 2012 election, about thirty of us met at Democratic Party headquarters in Port Angeles. A gifted Obama campaign organizer told the meeting, "Let's set ourselves a goal: We will knock on 1,000 doors for Obama this weekend."

Joyce was there even though she was badly crippled with pain in both knees. She was scheduled to have both knees replaced.

I was working with another woman and we finished up our list as the sun was setting that Sunday evening. I called Joyce on her cell.

"I have about fifty names on my list," she told me. "My partner has to leave. Can you come and help me?"

I drove immediately to pick her up. Then together we drove from one farm house to another in the pitch dark. She had a flashlight and climbed painfully out of the car and limped up to each door, knocked, and spoke to the voters. We completed the list. That weekend, our valiant team achieved our goal, knocking on 1,000 doors, talking with hundreds of voters on why it was so urgent to defeat Mitt Romney and reelect Obama.

Washington State has an all-mail ballot so on election day, Joyce was scheduled for her knee replacement surgery at Olympic Medical Center in Port Angeles. When the votes were counted, Obama carried our country by a margin of fewer than 100 votes. We celebrated in Joyce's hospital room, both the success of Joyce's surgery the day before and Obama's reelection victory. Sylvia Hancock, a wonderful grassroots leader of the Democratic Party came to visit Joyce and thank her for her heroic effort. She gave Joyce a comical figurine of a snowman. We treasure it still.

Joyce's "bum-knee-be-damned" attitude is one reason Obama won. We were part of the vast majority movement that

elected—and reelected—our nation’s first Black president, a victory over racism.

Plotting to Defend Free Speech at the “Blue Moon”

People’s World April 26, 2016

Gus Hall was coming to the Pacific Northwest in February 1962. Members of the Communist Party of Washington State were elated. Party organizer, Milford Sutherland, had worked hard setting up speaking engagements for Hall to speak at campuses all across the state from Spokane to Bellingham to Ellensburg to Seattle and Tacoma.

Hall had recently been released from Leavenworth Penitentiary where he had been railroaded to prison for over six and a half years falsely charged under the Smith Act of “conspiring to teach or advocate the overthrow of the government by force and violence.”

Hall and the twelve others jailed under this infamous witchhunt law were not accused of a single act of violence. They had not stockpiled arms or trained in the woods for terrorism or guerrilla warfare. No, Hall was imprisoned for his ideas, for upholding the notion that at some time in the future, the majority of the people of the United States might decide to “alter or abolish” the government and replace it with another government. In Hall’s words, he was jailed for “the crime of thinking.”

Hall’s life was an open book. He had been a steelworker, a founder of the United Steelworkers, one of several Communist Party union activists recruited by United Mine



Clip from “The Worker” of Gus Hall with his photograph courtesy of *People’s World*