

Project Dayshoot30

An Oregon Self-Portrait for the Digital Age

by Brian Burk

AFFIXING HIS SIGNATURE to the paper on his desk, Oregon Gov. Victor Atiyeh declared July 15, 1983, “Oregon Photojournalism Day.” In the proclamation, he stated: “I call upon all Oregonians to recognize the many contributions that photojournalists are making to preserve the daily elements of our lives.”¹ The occasion for the proclamation was Project Dayshoot, a venture involving ninety-two photographers, mostly professionals, who captured images across Oregon between midnight and midnight on July 15.

Much about the way we transmit and receive images has changed during the intervening years. Although the craft of photojournalism — the presentation of truthful stories through visual means — still exists, in an age when more than half of Americans carry a camera phone with the ability to upload images immediately to the Internet, the distinction between photojournalist and amateur photogra-

pher can sometimes be blurry.² Thirty years to the day after Project Dayshoot, a new project — Dayshoot30 — paid homage to the original while reflecting changes in technology and journalism over the decades between.

The idea for Project Dayshoot came from a group of Oregon photojournalists who called themselves Snap Decisions.³ In February 1983, Oregon Historical Society (OHS) museum administrator Robert Stark invited the group to create an exhibition for the society’s gallery. Sparked by Rick Smolan’s 1981 project covering all of Australia, the day-in-the-life concept was in vogue at the time, and the group decided to try something similar in Oregon. What began as a plan for a museum exhibition soon evolved into the creation of a book under the direction of Bruce Taylor Hamilton, executive editor of the society’s book-publishing department, at the time named Western Imprints (and not in operation today). A project that would



2:40 p.m.; Oneonta Gorge: Chuck Stephens and his daughter Evelyn, age three, of Portland, are pulled through the water by their husky dog, Monroe.

likely have been preserved only in the memories of its participants and those who attended the exhibition was thus immortalized on the pages of *One Average Day*, which took its title from the text of Atiyeh's proclamation.

I first heard of Project Dayshoot nearly three decades later with a chance discovery of *One Average Day* at Powell's Books in Portland. Interested in local history as well as photography, I bought the book and enjoyed thumbing through its 130 pages of mostly black-and-white pictures. I had always liked the day-in-the-life concept and was excited to

see an example of it projected onto my home state. I was fairly young in 1983, and I found it fascinating to link the images in *One Average Day* to my somewhat dim memories of growing up in Portland.

Soon, however, the book simply sat on a shelf in my living room, the images on its pages sealed off, unseen, inert — until one day in May 2013, when I pulled it down again. It had occurred to me that the thirtieth anniversary of the project was coming up in July, and I wondered if it would be possible to get some of the original photographers back together

An aerial photograph showing a vast field of dark, circular hay bales. The bales are arranged in concentric, overlapping circles that create a textured, almost hypnotic pattern across the landscape. The lighting is very low, making the scene appear almost entirely black, with only subtle variations in tone highlighting the individual bales and the overall circular structure. The field extends to the horizon, where a few small, indistinct shapes might be vehicles or structures.

*5:52 a.m.;
near
Boardman:
Two vehicles
belonging to
Castle Rock
Farms bale
hay at first
light. Mid
July is grass
and wheat
harvesting
season in
Oregon.*





11:10 a.m.; near Bob Straub State Park in Pacific City: Kelly Fraser leads a beach horseback riding adventure for Green Acres Beach and Trail Rides.

for another shoot. I recognized a few of their names — Bruce Forster, Michael Lloyd, Tim Jewett, Ross Hamilton — and with the encouragement of Lauren Kessler, director of my multimedia journalism graduate program at the University of Oregon, I set about trying to contact some of them. The first photographers I reached were Cathy Cheney and Michal Thompson, who had helped organize the 1983 project. Their enthusiasm for the idea of a commemorative project inspired me to reach out to as many of the original group as I could find and also to begin recruiting new photographers to contribute.

Another midnight-to-midnight statewide plan took shape. The project gained momentum with more participants signing on and OHS becoming an enthusiastic partner, echoing its involvement in 1983. A planning committee met each Monday evening at the *Portland Business Journal* offices, and Michael Lloyd handed me an unexpected treasure: the collected planning materials and notes from the 1983 project, meticulously stored in a bulging, red three-ring binder, saved from the trash bin several years ago for reasons he could not exactly explain. On its cover, several potential project names, including “An Image

of Oregon” and “Around a New Day” had been crossed out, illustrating the difficulty of summarizing such an ambitious venture in a single phrase.

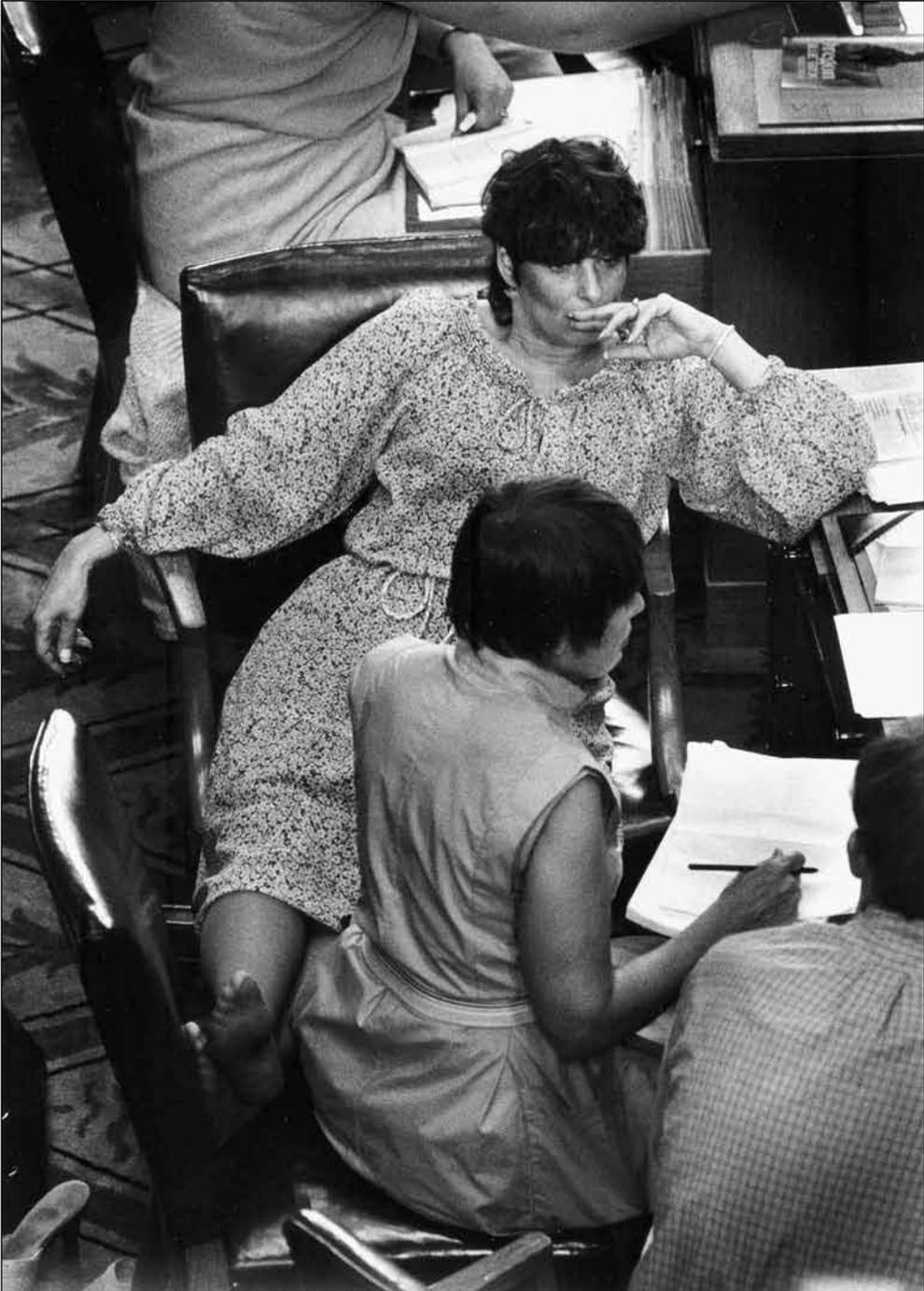
In order to generate more public awareness of and interest in Dayshoot30, as well as to illustrate the democratization of photography brought about by smartphones and application software such as Instagram (which allows users to edit and upload photos they take with their phones for instantaneous, mass broadcast), organizers opened the project to anyone

in the state. On the day of the shoot, participants uploaded their images to various social media outlets with the common label #Dayshoot30. This resulted in the inclusion of photos that would not have been seen otherwise, such as a shot by J. Avery of a hot summer day at the Grant Park Pool in Portland. Thus, in its two versions, Project Dayshoot served as a bridge between eras — not only by depicting 1980s Oregon and 2010s Oregon but also by incorporating traditional photojournalism and avant-garde image



Paul Carter

6:51 a.m.; Eugene: Father Chrispine Otieno (right) makes the sign of the cross as he prays before the morning Mass on Monday, July 15, 2013. He is shown in the sacristy of St. Mary Catholic Church in downtown Eugene with parishioners and Father Dan Maurer. St. Mary Parish was established in 1887 in Eugene; the present church was built in 1927.



2:45 p.m.; Salem: After waiting around on the last lingering day of the 62nd Oregon Legislative Assembly session on July 15, 1983, then Representative Vera Katz (future Mayor of Portland) rests her feet on the floor of the House.



Ed Vidulichhoff

6:40 a.m.; Columbia River: In 1983, a ship heads down river to the mouth of the Columbia. Early morning mist and fog shroud the Trojan Nuclear Power Plant, which is no longer exists.



Randy Wood

4:30 p.m.; Rajneeshpuram: During Project Dayshoot (1983), a blindfolded follower of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was captured on film as she took time for peace and solitude. This two-acre Buddha Hall was located at Rajneeshpuram, an intentional community near Antelope in central Oregon that was dissolved four years later.



8:02 a.m.; Portland: At Portland Meadows racetrack, horse trainer Linda Norchan chats with a jockey by telephone to discuss when the horse Mary Jo might return from an injury. Portland Meadows faces an uncertain financial future as its managers try to grow attendance at its races.

gathering. It is rare that a photography project brings together representatives from such disparate periods.

Technology — in terms of how images were made and recorded — was the key difference between the two projects. In 1983, digital imagery was not commercially available (although it should be noted that the world’s first digital scan was performed in 1957 by Russell Kirsch on a photo of his then three-month-old son, Walden, who became a contributing photographer to the 2013 project).⁴ In 2013, the vast majority of images taken were digital,

though we encouraged photographers to shoot on film and some did. The inclusion of video in the 2013 project is another example of the expanding possibilities of the digital age, adding the dimensions of motion and sound to further capture the essence of the day.

Seen as a “visual time capsule,” as some have described the genre, a collection like this one serves to distill a small sample of Oregon life for the benefit of current and future generations.⁵ As Michal Thompson wrote in his preface to *One Average Day*: “Had



11:14 a.m.; near Sutherlin: Loggers (from left) Jon Cunningham of Drain, Seth Williamson of Elkton, and Justin Helgren of Elkton work at a logging site. The men hang on the guyline to eliminate slack as a yarder is raised into position. The yarder is a tower that is used to pull felled trees up a slope.

14 July or 16 July been chosen for coverage, the kaleidoscope of images would have shifted and the same photographers would have produced an entirely different collection.”⁶ Images are rooted to the time and place in which they are made while also possessing an ephemeral, passing quality, each one distilling a unique moment never to be repeated.

With this project, we have rediscovered a time capsule from thirty years ago while creating a new one to be discovered by future explorers. The images in *One Average Day* depict

moments that likely seemed mundane or ordinary in 1983 but take on added significance when viewed through the prism of the intervening three decades of Oregon history. See, for example, Michael Lloyd’s candid shot of future Portland mayor Vera Katz, resting her stockinged feet on the floor of the Oregon House as the legislative session wound to a close; Randy Wood’s photographs of residents of Rajneeshpuram, depicting a community of worshippers unaware of its pending dissolution a mere four years later; or Ed Vidinghoff’s tranquil image



6:09 a.m.; Eugene: Two-year-old Alan Darnell-Nelson (right) wakes up between his two mothers, Kristine Nelson (left) and her partner of eight years, Kelly Darnell.



of the massive cooling tower at the Trojan Nuclear Power Plant lurking in an early morning mist, later to be pulverized by a controlled implosion in 2006. In other words, just because an image is “still” does not mean it is static. And so it is with the thousands of images collected for Dayshoot30. We do not yet know how their meaning will evolve as time wears on. Perhaps one of them captures the face of a future history maker not yet known to the public. Or maybe they depict a trade that will change dramatically in

the future, such as Michael Sullivan’s image of loggers near Sutherlin. Cathy Cheney’s image of jockeys training at Portland Meadows may be among the last taken there, as the racetrack faces a bleak financial horizon. Just as a landscape changes color under different types of light, so too will the meaning of these photographs change as the story of Oregon unfolds.

For some of the photojournalists involved, the project itself had a restorative effect on how they felt about their occupation. Chris Pietsch,

Craig Strong



10:13 a.m.; Lower Descutes River: Dan Johnson of Des Moines, Washington, casts his Spey rod while fishing guide Tom Larimer records his casting for analysis on an iPad app. This image highlights the numerous uses for digital imagery that are key differences between Project Dayshoot (1983) and Project Dayshoot30 (2013).



4:44 p.m.; Oregon City/Gladstone: A young woman seeks cooling from the summer heat by jumping off a rock in Oregon City near High Rocks City Park in Gladstone along the Clackamas River. The temperature reached 87 degrees on the day of the shoot.

who has worked as a photographer for the Eugene *Register-Guard* for twenty-five years, chose a same-sex couple and their children in Lane County for one of his Dayshoot30 assignments. “I got really fired up with the pictures that I was making and wished more

assignments would be like that,” he said. “I probably wouldn’t have been motivated to do that story had it not been for the Dayshoot project, but when I was all done I thought, why not? So here I am, this 56-year-old guy. You need to reinvent yourself



7:45 a.m.; Warm Springs: Kahmussa Green, age seven, steps into the bright sun outside her home. Adopted by her mother, Charlie Green, her name means respect. Her family lives on 188 acres with the Deschutes River bordering one side, but only 37 acres are flat, which they use for gardening and breaking horses.

once in a while in this business to keep the fun of it.⁷ Indeed, the business of journalism itself is in a period of reinvention, as evidenced by the June 2013 reorganization at the *Oregonian*. The state's largest daily newspaper announced it was laying off a number of its newsroom staff (including three Dayshoot30 organizers), reducing the number of home delivery days from seven to four, and revamping its online presence.⁸ In some ways, Dayshoot30 was symbolic of this transformation in journalism, with its mixture of professional and lay participation and instant Web-based results. But,

while the project demonstrates that the definition of photojournalism is in flux, it also shows that such work is vital and must be preserved. As Michal Thompson reflected after his Dayshoot30 experience: "The role of a . . . newspaper photographer [is] to show what matters in the community. That job amounts to more than merely pointing a camera and framing content. It amounts to understanding photography as a language, understanding how to use the tools of photography, but most of all, it involves understanding the community itself."⁹

This is a quiet, earnest collection



5:55 a.m.; Salem: Samuel Williams waits to be counted in his cell inside the Oregon State Penitentiary, where he has served twenty years of a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

of images. They are photographs of Oregonians on a typical workday, or enjoying an idyllic summer afternoon. They are photographs filled with people, or without a soul in sight. They capture moments of familial intimacy, such as Pietsch's image of a two-year-old snuggling between his two mothers, and the essence of a carefree summer, as in Dan Sadowsky's snap of a woman jumping off High Rocks into the Clackamas River (one of many captured for Dayshoot30 with an iPhone). It is difficult for any one person to fully appreciate Oregon's diversity in the full sense of that word

— cultural, economic, geographic — but, with the help of the images submitted by photographers on July 15, one begins to get a sense of just how much is happening across this vast area at each moment of every day. Even if thousands of photographers had participated in Dayshoot30, we would still be left with only a small slice of the story of Oregon on July 15, 2013. Nevertheless, each one of the images tells its own complete story.

Within the space of a single summer's day, 153 invited participants — including 33 of the original 1983 contributors — submitted over 3,000





*8:49 p.m.; near Condon:
Photographer Alan Thornton watches
the sun set near an abandoned house.
This photograph was taken by Joni
Kabana with an iPhone 4S.*



10:51 a.m.; Smith Rock State Park: One of Oregon's youngest bald eagles, this bird hatched on April 7 and first took flight on July 1, about two weeks before this photograph was taken.

still images and 100 video files to Dayshoot30. An unknown number of participants on social media uploaded dozens more. The meaning of this collection is open to the interpretation of each person who explores it, for each person brings his or her own experiences and understanding to such an exploration. This subjectivity reflects the challenge for historians — and for journalists — who are tasked with synthesizing large quantities of data into a cohesive narrative, a single storyline of what happened and why

it matters. This project illustrates that there is not one story of a day in Oregon life, but millions, as a diverse population interacts with an equally diverse landscape. With each day's twist of the kaleidoscope — as Michal Thompson put it — a new mosaic of stories emerges. Thanks to the dedication and talent of the Project Dayshoot and Dayshoot30 photographers, two of those mosaics have been preserved for the benefit of all Oregonians.



11:44 p.m.; Sparks Lake: The Milky Way and Mount Bachelor as seen from Sparks Lake in the Deschutes National Forest.

NOTES

I am grateful to Randy Cox for assisting with the photo edit for this piece. For more information about Dayshoot30 and to view other images collected via social media, please visit: <http://www.dayshoot30.org>.

1. "Governor's Proclamation," July 8, 1983; *One Average Day* (Portland: Western Imprints, 1984).

2. Joanna Stern, "More Than Half of Americans Own Smartphones," *abcnews.go.com*, ABC News, June 6, 2013, (accessed July 30, 2013).

3. Michal Thompson, "Preface," *One Average Day*, vii.

4. Rachel Ehrenberg, "Digital Image Founder Smooths Out Pixels," *news.*

discovery.com, June 26, 2010 (accessed July 30, 2013).

5. Rick Smolan, David Cohen, and Leslie Smolan, *A Day in the Life of America* (New York: Collins, 1986), 13.

6. Thompson, "Preface," *One Average Day*, viii.

7. Chris Pietsch, interview by author, July 30, 2013.

8. Aaron Mesh, "Black and White and Red All Over," *Willamette Week*, June 26, 2013 (accessed August 1, 2013).

9. Michal Thompson, reflection shared with author in anticipation of article to be published in the *Hillsboro Argus* during August 2013.