OREGON

A CONTRARY UNIT

Joanne B. Mulcahy

> Languages, though not necessarily synonymous with distinct cultures, express a bond between people and place that offers perhaps the closest human counterpart to the adaptive "fit" of genetically distinct salmon stocks to their ancestral coastal streams.
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> —*The Rainforests of Home: An Atlas of People and Place*

They named themselves as they stood, one by one, survivors of nations within our state: Burns Paiute, Coquille, Klamath, the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua, and five separate groups of Confederated Tribes—Grand Ronde; Warm Springs; Siletz; Umatilla; and Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw. Beaded regalia shimmered under the lights of the Portland Convention Center, newly opened in 1990. Smatterings of Sahaptin and Chinook mixed with English as Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes processed through the hall. Their presence refuted the 1950s attempt to assimilate American Indians by terminating their tribal status. Of the 106 tribes and bands terminated nationally, 62 had been native to Oregon. They called themselves "The First Oregonians."

My friend Eva names herself this way: Genoveva Castellanoz—Mexicana, Latina, *curandera* (healer), Catholic, traditional artist, and finally, with a hint of pride in her voice, Oregonian. Born in Guanajuato and raised in Texas, she arrived in Nyssa on the Oregon–Idaho border as a young bride at eighteen. The families of her nine children now encircle Eva as she heals the sick from migrant camps and teaches Latino arts to local gang members. Surveying the vast sugar-beet fields surrounding Nyssa, she says, "This was my daddy's dream. He came here as a *bracero* to make a home. I want to be part of it—the realization of that dream." The 1940s *bracero* program brought Mexican laborers north to fill labor shortages during World War II, presaging the steady stream of Hispanic workers who now make up 8 percent of Oregon's population.

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Sabah, Carmen, Fatime, Mabi, and Valeriana gather once a month for a sewing circle run by Portland's Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization. Spanish blends with Pashtun, Arabic, French, and English as women in chadors, dashikis, and jeans admire one another's handwork. A microcosm of the nearly ten thousand refugees and immigrants arriving every year, they come together to preserve essential parts of their cultures.

Hope and Harold McLaughlin moved from Colorado to a farm near Enterprise in eastern Oregon's Wallowa Mountains. They embody pioneer resourcefulness, utilizing everything: rags and scraps for Hope's quilts and rugs, scarce water to irrigate their acreage, bits of lumber for Harold's tables and picture frames.

All are Oregonians, seeking to fit language and culture to place. I met many of them traversing the state, first as a folklorist seeking local arts, then as a writer teaching workshops. Despite the seeming uniformity of an 86 percent white and English-speaking population, we are distinct. Our ancestral streams are many and growing. In Portland's schools, loudspeakers blare announcements in Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. In what was a predominantly Caucasian Willamette Valley, one in four residents now claims a racial identity other than white.

As a folklorist, I listen to stories. What I've heard is what unites us: passionate commitment to a place sacred to its indigenous inhabitants, an "Eden" to the first white settlers. What I've heard is what divides us: fear that we lack bounty enough for so many cultures, doubt that we'll find a lingua franca amid the growing Babel.

I came to Oregon in the 1970s, a wanderer from the east. In my early twenties, I fell in love with a fisherman, then with the drenched rain forests, headlands, and estuaries of the Oregon Coast. The holy triumvirate of fishing, logging, and farming ruled the economy then. Trawlers and crabbers dotted the craggy coastline; gargantuan logging trucks thundered by on my first drive from the Portland airport to the ocean. Much in the Willamette Valley echoed the New England of my family's heritage: simple clapboard houses with wraparound porches, miles of dairy farms, and Eastern monikers like Portland. The Maine namesake replaced "Stumptown" after an 1851 coin toss that might have yielded Boston. Green prairies rising to buttes, groves of hazelnuts, the snow cap of Mount Hood gleaming on the horizon—my first views evoked the mythic descriptions of the early white settlers. Local folklore records the story of a man who died and went to heaven only to discover people there chained and guarded. They were, Saint Peter explained, Oregonians yearning to go back.

How does one claim a place as home? I remember an old man in Baker City who stopped playing his fiddle mid-tune to tell me he hoped to die an Oregonian. I found his statement quaint; after all, he'd only come from Idaho. Then I heard similar stories from others; finally, it was my story, too, when I realized I'd never leave Oregon.

Like zealous converts everywhere, our attachment is deep. The land beguiles us: a three-hundred-mile coast zoned against private development, central Oregon's juniper and sage desert and painted hills, the azure basin of Crater Lake, the cliffs and chasms of the Columbia River Gorge, and eastern Oregon's rim-rock canyons and migratory-bird refuges. The people welcome, exhibiting the fabled friendliness outsiders always note, despite Governor Tom McCall's famous 1971 exhortation to visitors to please not stay. We're proud of the state's environmental record, embodied and mythologized in the 1971 first mandatory bottle-deposit law. We're traditional, attached to old-fashioned celebrations like Portland's ninety-six-year-old Rose Festival, complete with the Queen of

Rosaria and her court, and we're progressive, organizing for some of the country's largest antiwar demonstrations during Vietnam, the 1991 Gulf War, and the recent war in Iraq. Even when the "we" breaks down and old divisions gape, a shared contrariness surfaces. Consider the decision on physician-assisted suicide. Even those who voted against the referendum can claim the vote as typically Oregonian.

I live in Portland now. Poised at the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia rivers, our largest city's famed livability garners descriptions of a small-town feel. We boast 9,400 green acres, including Forest Park, the largest urban wilderness in the country; extensive light-rail and bike-path systems; a stunning Chinese classical garden; the largest independent bookstore in the world, Powell's City of Books; a thriving arts scene; and remarkably diverse architecture including an icon of postmodernism, Michael Graves's Portland Building. In 1985, the building's facade gained *Portlandia*, the sculpture of a crouching woman holding a trident. She traveled via barge along the Columbia River, then flatbed truck through the city. Locals lined the streets in welcome, hands outstretched to touch her pounded copper before she ascended to a third-story perch. Bent at the knees, *Portlandia* measures thirty-six feet tall, but were she to rise, she'd tower at fifty feet.

We may need her erect posture at this particular juncture, someone to stand tall enough to propell us from the mire of 8 percent unemployment; one of the highest rates of hunger in the nation (5.2–6.2 percent, depending on the survey); among the lowest allocations of spending for the arts (one study lists us fifty-second, behind Guam and American Samoa); an inability to fund the innovative and nationally lauded Oregon Health Plan; and a consistent refusal to institute a sales tax, despite an educational funding crisis spurred by a 1990 referendum that rolled back the support base of property taxes.

What happened in Eden? Local and global forces have driven many from The Garden. High-tech companies, service jobs, and tourism

edged out resource-based industries; automation and the decline of unions forced wage cutbacks. High-tech's own descent followed, busting the 1990s gold rush. Jobs elsewhere lure newly minted teachers; loggers and fishermen must reinvent themselves. In rural areas, economic choices are uneven and sometimes unsavory. Witness eastern Oregon's Umatilla County, where growth rests on Wal-Mart, a state prison, and a chemical-weapons incinerator.

Our passion for the land may be shared; not so our vision of its husbandry. In the 1980s loggers clashed with environmentalists over the endangered spotted owl in the Willamette Valley's old-growth forests. In 2002, water wars erupted in southern Oregon. Farmers and the Klamath Indians sparred when the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation diverted irrigation water to endangered suckerfish held sacred by the tribe. Along the coast, 3,437,200 hectares form part of the largest contiguous coastal temperate rain forest in the world. Dense ecosystems that sustained human communities for five millennia still survive. But just barely. Development has claimed 44 percent, threatening salmon and watersheds.

Was Eden ever real? Or did our shaky economy simply expose the myth of plenty and opportunity for all? Surely Oregon was less than Edenic for African-Americans who arrived as cowboys and railroad workers in the nineteenth century or to the shipyards during World War II. They faced racist laws including a ban on interracial marriage until 1951. Plenty eluded the Chinese who confronted the 1880s depression, exclusionary laws, and violence. Opportunity had a different cast for the family of a Japanese-American woman in a workshop I taught in Hood River. While others described a deep sense of community, she detailed displacement, internment camps, and lingering shame.

As Oregon's economic woes deepened, rifts formed between self-defined "real" Oregonians and "others." Xenophobia and hate crimes surged after 9/11. Attacks against Arab-Americans and Sikhs escalated; DIE JEW and swastikas appeared on the gates of Portland's

Shaarie Torah cemetery. Each incident recalled earlier waves of fear. In 1992, the Oregon Citizens' Alliance introduced Ballot Measure 9 to limit gay rights. That fall, I traveled south to Springfield, conservative sister city to liberal Eugene, where Earth First and Grateful Dead stickers flourish. My NO ON 9 bumper-stickered car was filled with woodcarvings from an art exhibit to return to a retired logger. At his house, we talked about everything but politics. As I rose to leave, he nodded toward my car. "Can't we just let people live their lives?"

We could, but we haven't—at least not the tribes terminated, the gays and lesbians excluded, or the ethnic and religious populations threatened. We might learn from the embedded fault lines in our history. The Spanish ventured north first, reaching the southern coast as early as 1542. The British followed, vying with the French Canadians and Americans, who triumphed with the creation of the Oregon Territory in 1848, then statehood in 1859. The contests' prizes were many: the mythic trade route between Atlantic and Pacific, furs for Asian trade, souls to convert, and always, land. In 1823, the U.S. Supreme Court's "doctrine of the right of discovery" ruled that Indians, as nomads, didn't own the land. The predictable logic of displacement followed: free land to white immigrants, negotiated but unratified treaties, the reservation system, and the repression of indigenous traditions and languages.

Like people everywhere, we find myth more alluring than history. Our story of Eden is not false but partial—it fits if you're the right sort of person at the right historical moment.

There are places in Oregon that feel to me like ancestral songlines. Several times a year I visit Menucha, a retreat center in the Columbia River Gorge. Standing on an overlook above the river, I listen for a train whistle that catapults me back to the small Vermont town where I spent childhood summers. Grief rises at the memory of leaving soil soaked in family history; a surge of affection follows for the home I've

found. Perhaps this is what all immigrants feel: nostalgia for the abandoned place, renewed passion for the chosen one. The open spirit of Oregon birthed me as a writer, nourished my language and culture. Knowing that this sense of possibility has not been equally extended to others chastens the comfort of my connection here.

Can we find a language of inclusion? Is restitution of past wrongs possible? I might have asked someone from the farmworkers' organization, the Human Dignity Coalition, Basic Rights Oregon or a host of other social-change organizations. But imagining the future evokes the past, triggering a still-searing memory from The First Oregonians Conference. At the close of the gathering, one elder stood to tearfully acknowledge the tribes' first reunion since the nineteenth century. She urged those assembled to address the past but move beyond it. Her optimism stunned me. The near decimation of language and culture, the loss of land, the brutal fact of tribal termination—how could they recover?

On my last trip to the coast, I veered off Highway 18 just past the turnoff for the Grand Ronde Tribes' Spirit Mountain Casino. At the tribe's Educational Complex, Tony Johnson's class was winding down for the day. His black ponytail hung to one side as Tony velcroed shut tiny shoes and hunted stray lunch boxes. Isabelle, the newest participant in this language-immersion program, lingered for one more story from an illustrated book. She pointed to a mouse's long tail to explain the words "yutskat up^{h}uch" pasted over the English text. Her face brightened as she chattered away in what most assume is a dead language—Chinook wawa to indigenous tribes, Chinook Jargon to the French, English, and Americans who added loan words to this Northwest Creole. Words for objects unknown to local Indians such as "fork" found form through relationship—"opitsah yakha sikh"—"friend to the knife." The language is built on compounds—a grammar of connection. The need

for communication across difference was also the Jargon's genesis, Tony explained. "The tribes created the creole long before outsiders arrived. When Indians speaking different languages married outside their tribe, they needed a new language. They invented Chinook wawa." He paused for a moment, clear eyes focused on a distant point—the past, perhaps the future. "To whites, the Jargon was for trade. But to us, Chinook wawa is a language of love and relationship."

Watching Isabelle wrap her arms around Tony's legs, I glimpsed why he passed up a graduate fellowship in linguistics to teach here. Born in Washington to the Chinook tribe, he is to my mind a real Oregonian: committed to something larger than himself, to this place, these children, and a unique way of speaking and knowing that might otherwise pass from the earth.

Two hundred years ago, different languages thrived at the mouth of every Oregon river—Chinookan, Sahaptin, Molallan, Cayusan, Lutuamian, Kalapuyan-Takelman, Alsean, and Siuslawan among them. Liz Woody, a poet from the Warm Springs Reservation, tells of hearing stories from her maternal uncle about the days when multiple languages and tribes prospered. Different worldviews and scarce resources threatened their unity, too. Perhaps they seemed as different to one another as the newest Afghani refugee seems to her Mexican neighbor, as foreign as some of my fellow Portlanders seem to me when they vote against taxes for health care and school funding. But the earliest tribes understood that survival depended on mutual respect, on language that connected, and on sharing wealth in ceremonies such as the huckleberry feast.

A few months ago, I journeyed to Enterprise to visit with Hope and Harold McLaughlin. Harold waited to display his portable wooden tables, multiplying since he retired from farming at age eighty-six last year. As we talked, Harold burst out, "We're so different! I wonder why we're friends?" Hope surveyed him with affection and incredulity before pronouncing, "Because we're so different."

Our differences shouldn't threaten equitable distribution. In piecing together strained resources, we have models: the inventiveness of the early pioneers, the huckleberry feast. Restoration beckons —of watersheds and salmon, of jobs for displaced workers, of the dignity of excluded peoples and their cultures. In learning to communicate, we might look to the creoles born of our multilingual past. Perhaps there lies the root of a language of relationship, a contemporary Chinook Jargon reaching across our divides.

PENNSYLVANIA

Kathryn Davis

When I was girl of sixteen, more innocent and fanciful than any sixteen-year-old girl would dream of being these dreary days, after we all got herded across the bridge into the twenty-first century, there were two places in my natal city of Philadelphia where I particularly loved to go. One was high atop City Hall, where you could stand in the open air at the enormous feet of the statue of William Penn; the other was deep inside the Franklin Institute, where you could take a walk through the enormous chambers of a talking, beating heart.

William Penn and Benjamin Franklin: you might say that these two men, in combination, represent some essential character of the state of Pennsylvania, a peculiar admixture of sobriety and imagination, of gravity and wit. William Penn was a devout Quaker, a staunch advocate of religious freedom and a lover of nature, who made friends with the Native tribes and learned their language. Benjamin Franklin, on the other hand, was a sharp-tongued intellectual, the enormously charming and politically astute cosmopolite who gave us *Poor Richard's Almanac* and bifocal lenses and the glass harmonica. Even at John Story Jenks Elementary School, which I