

After the Fire is Over

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April 2011

A common bumper sticker we can all relate to these days is “I know we’re going, but what is a handbasket?”

Going you-know-where in a handbasket was far from my mind on a recent day when I returned to the Northwest from an Arizona vacation. It was one of those rare spring days when daffodils waved underneath sunny blue skies and folks came out of their cold cranky moods of winter to embrace the hope of spring. The dreary days of winter, desert drought and dry days in our hearts seemed distant.

Years ago, when I lived in Arizona, visiting friends often said, “Everything’s dead here; there’s no color.” Not quite. Springtime in the desert is a sight to behold even though the Sonoran desert is brown this year—Mother Nature’s call. I’m distressed to learn in Saguaro National Park that some saguaro cactus, affected by a recent freeze, are weeping, their frozen core of 200 gallons of water now melting. These enduring giants, some over 200 years old, after surviving years of drought, have now succumbed in two nights of a hard freeze. On an evening tour of the desert called *Saguaros at Sunset*, because of little rain, the park ranger cautioned us to not expect much bloom. We trudged along dusty trails to the overlook not expecting much. But up on the hillside, in dusky shadow, deep fuchsia blooms on a barrel cactus stood out in all their glory. We stopped, exclaimed, took photographs, and breathed anew. Yes, I told myself, the desert does bloom, even in the midst of drought and weeping saguaros.

Drought, weeping saguaros, dreary days surround us. In our own community, contentions and strife have arisen over an important May election for openings on both the Board of the Nehalem Bay Fire & Rescue District and the North County Recreation District Board. Six candidates are running for

three slots on each board. Many folks have conflicting opinions as to who will best serve our communities, and how much their choices will cost taxpayers and affect our future. Should we build a new pool at NCRD? Should the facility be closed? Should the budget of the approved fire district be reduced? Each side believes they have the answer. Now is the time for all citizens to study the issues carefully, check the facts, ignore rumors and untruths, attend public forums and take an active part in creating the future they want by casting informed votes. The Nehalem Bay Fire district and NCRD district are probably two of the most important organizations in North County that determine our quality of life. Who we elect to carry forth our vision for our communities is important. The choices we make deserve informed voters. What's at stake for our towns? What's it worth to us? Can we overcome our differences? What might we lose if we don't?

In her album, *Simple Things*, Amy Grant sings:

“After the fire is over,
after the ashes cool,
after the smoke gets blown away,
I will be here....”

After these ashes cool, this community of neighbors, friends, and comrades will still be here. We need each other. We are people who care for one another, who do the right thing, who give of our time and ourselves to make a difference in our communities.

By listening, treating each other with kindness, dignity and respect, maybe the only reference to hand baskets, at least in our towns, will be a May Day basket of flowers we leave as a gift at our neighbor's doorstep.