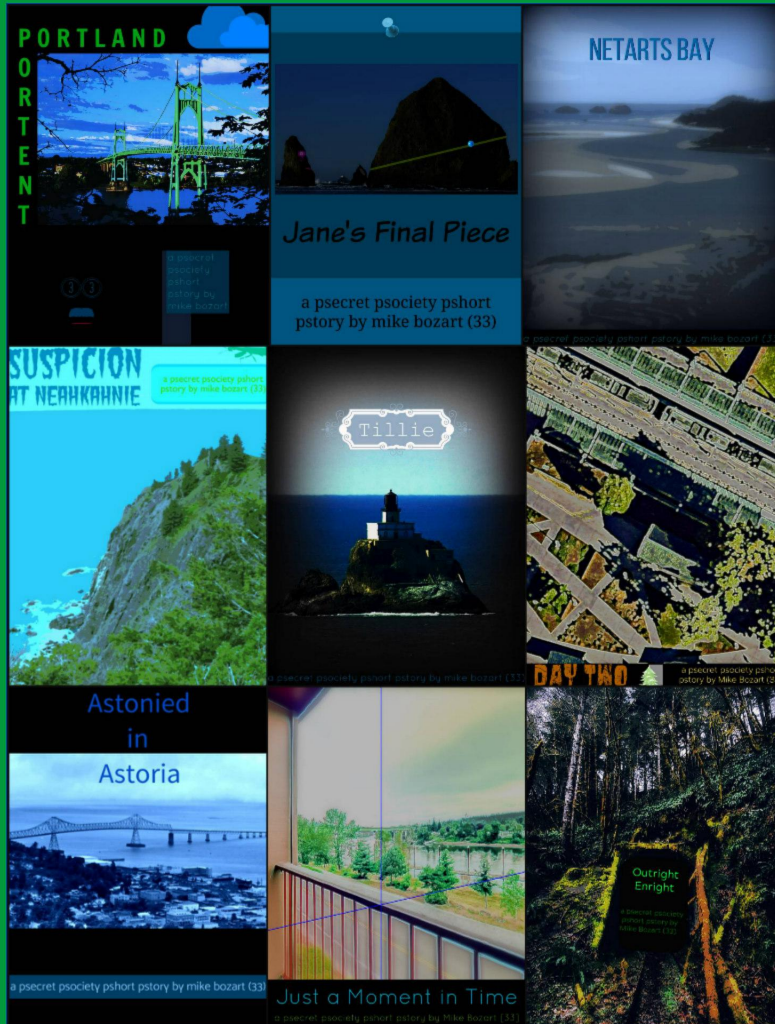


NW ORE TALES

a nonet of northwestern Oregon compositions by Mike Bozart (33)



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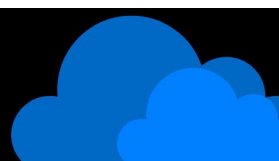
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Table of Contents

i	<u>Portland Portent</u>
ii	<u>Jane's Final Piece</u>
iii	<u>Netarts Bay</u>
iv	<u>Suspicion at Neahkahnie</u>
v	<u>Tillie</u>
vi	<u>Day Two</u>
vii	<u>Astonied in Astoria</u>
viii	<u>Just a Moment in Time</u>
ix	<u>Outright Enright</u>

PORTLAND

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Portland Portent by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | SEP 2015

Portland Portent

by Mike Bozart

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Way back in October of 1992, when I was 28 and feeling no pain in the brain (the shunt was behaving), I decided to take a trip from San Francisco to Portland. No, not for cement. And, no, not to Portland, Maine – to the city named after that one: the Rose City of Oregon. Hipsterville, USA, or <splooosh> Puddleville (a name derived from all the pools of water created by those oh-so-frequent wintertime rain showers).

The mode of travel would be a Greyhound bus. Yes, I was on an extra-lean budget (and still am). Even back then (before I ever ventured into the realm of creative writing), I knew that taking an overnight, west-coast bus trip would be interesting. Well, at least once. And, I should probably mention that I still had some of those tranquility-inducing, quasi-magical, Sidle on N granules.

The trip started around five on a Wednesday afternoon. The weather was tourist-enticing and postcard-perfect: sunny with a few clouds moving in; temperature: 75° F. [24° C]

That bus seat felt more comfortable than imagined as we crossed the Bay Bridge. *Nice. I can do this.*

In Oakland, a short layover where the bus filled to about 60% of capacity. The mood was subdued and quiet. Everyone seemed to be tired from an active autumn day. Or, maybe they had just smoked too much weed. *Oaksterdam.*

Our route had us taking I-80 East to Sacramento. We arrived in the Golden State capital around 7:30 (I think). It was a 19-minute layover as assorted people got on and off. It seemed like a net gain of 10. Ok, let's say 11 to keep this tale prime.

Soon, we were chugging north up I-5. Darkness dropped its drape (that sounds familiar) on the Central Valley. Thoughts wafted up to the overhead storage bins and tried to pick the luggage locks. And when we stopped at Red Bluff, things got, shall we say, varied and eenteresting. [*sic*]

Three notable (to this short story; everyone on that bus was notable, I am sure) persons climbed aboard: a pair of 50-something, Caucasian American, brown-haired, literary-inclined-looking females and a short Mexican American male in a white tank top, who must have been about 25 years old.

The two ladies sat down together across the aisle from me. They quickly got themselves situated and started to read and talk. I glanced over and noticed that the books were not romance novels – they were college English textbooks. They were making and comparing notes in the margins. *Are they English professors? But, why are they on this bus? For writing material?*

The Hispanic dude took a seat next to a white, blonde-haired, 19-to-21-year-old female, who was just in front of me. I saw him ask her if the seat was taken (even though there were still vacant double seats) through the crack between the tall seat backs. *Damn, this guy is really on the poon [sic] prowl. It's like he just got out of prison.*

The two in front of me began chatting away. He quickly gained her confidence. He told her that he had just been released from the Tehama County Jail and that he was going to get even with the guy who put him in there. *Well, my hunch was correct. Jeez, I hope that he doesn't have a loaded gun on him.*

Now, was the lass in front of me freaked out? No, quite the opposite. She was mucho [Spanish for 'much'] impressed with the newly released one. In fact, I think she was in love with him by Redding. *What a rough-hewn smooth operator he is. And, what an impressionable airhead she is.*

Through the northern California night we went. When I saw the sign for the town of Weed, I wondered how much weed was on the bus. I had an internal chuckle and, for some unknown reason, thought of Euler's famous identity equation: $e^{i\pi} + 1 = 0$. *How in the world did Leonhard come up with this mindboggling yet concisely elegant equation of irrationals and binary constants? What triggered his early 18th century synapses to arrive at this? What an astounding mind had he.*

After the little township of Hilt, we crossed the border into Oregon. I think it was around one AM, or maybe it was closer to two. Just about all of the passengers on the bus were asleep now. Even the young newly-lovers in front of me were peacefully snoring away.

I felt a little drowsy myself and soon started to nod off. However, I never went into REM sleep. I awoke as we pulled into Medford, Oregon.

I think three passengers got off and one, older, white-haired Caucasian American man wearing a SF Giants cap got on and took a seat in the front section. *Is that old man Malloy? Is he dogging my lost shadow? Or, shadowing my lost dog? Maybe someday I should write down these frivolous, pettifogging thoughts. Pettifogging ... what a petty situation ... when in the fog, trying to note trifling details. Yeah ... isn't it a petty? [sic] Now, isn't it a shame? [in George Harrison's singing voice]*

Then a pair of 30-something, über-tanned hippies got on at Grants Pass, toting quite an array of baggage. They bumped into a few passengers as they wobbled down the aisle. Some frowned upon awaking. *Looks like they're bringing the whole encampment with them.*

At Roseburg a lone gentleman got on the bus. He kind of looked like the infamous D. B. Cooper. *No, that can't be him. Or, can it?*

At Eugene the two English professors got off the bus. I watched the erudite ladies vanish around a brick corner. *Well, I'll probably never see them again. I wonder what becomes of them. Will either of them write a famous novel? But, how would I even know if one of them did? I don't know their names. Will they be mentioned in someone else's writing? Such a strange life this is.*

At the Corvallis stop, the two, just-awake-in-time, young lovers got off and disappeared into the dawn. I think it was around 7:30 AM. *Is she an Oregon State student? Her parents are going to love him.*

When the bus rolled into Salem, to be quite honest, all I could think of is that this was the home of Tawnni Cable, Playmate of the Month for the June '89 issue of Playboy magazine. How would I know this? No, I wasn't a Playboy subscriber or newsstand purchaser. However, I did find said issue in the basement laundry room of my Hyde Street [Lower Nob Hill, San Francisco] apartment building. There were worse things to look at.

Then an almost-lost neural connection was made and I remembered twirling the two interlocking white gears on a small, red, rectangular, thin, plastic box. It was that old US state capitals toy. (Anyone remember them from the '70s?)

You could turn either wheel and a capital would appear in the left window with its corresponding state in the right window. [Salem] [Oregon] I could still see it like it was yesterday. *Where is that geo-toy now?*

As we headed back for I-5, I spotted the Art Deco Salem capitol building in the rising sun. *Who is that golden man on top? [an unnamed Oregon pioneer] What a gaze. Careful with that axe in Eugene, Eugene.*

The bus made a brief stop in Woodburn. The older SFG-capped gentleman stepped off the bus. The driver wished him well. Then the older man replied, "Yep, yep, yep ..." as he hobbled away. *Damn, that really is Malloy! [Malloy is featured in the novella 'Mysterieu of San Francisco' and in the short stories 'A Search for Sidle on N' and 'Vermont Street'] What is he doing in Woodburn, Oregon of all places? Well, must remember to ask him when/if I see him again in San Francisco.*

Finally, at 9:47 AM, we were in Portland. Filtered sunlight trickled down to the partially leaf-covered, cracked sidewalk. There was some lingering patchy fog. I would guess that the temperature was about 55° F (12.8° C) on this splendid Thursday fall morning.

I quickly found a bus stop and caught a city bus to the North Portland sector of town. I wanted to find a motel in this area, as I planned to do some hiking and mushroom foraging in Forest Park the next day.

I checked in at the St. John Motor Lodge on Willamette Boulevard around 11:11 AM. (Yes, I remember looking down at my digital wristwatch.) They already had a room ready. The place was nothing to write home about, but it was clean and only two blocks from the St. Johns Bridge, which was how I planned to enter Forest Park tomorrow. I would be crossing the Gothic green bridge on foot.

As soon as I flopped down on the double bed, I was lights-out. I had only slept a total of two hours, at most, on the bus. I was one bleary-eyed, mileage-weary traveler.

I quickly drifted into a dream state. In the dream I walked to an overlook of the Willamette River. I saw the St. Johns Bridge from the western shore. There were two round discs in the suspension bridge towers' openings that looked like

occult octopus eyes. Some irregular-shaped, red object was floating below in the river at a position that made it look like a mouth of a face. Well, to give you a better mental image, here's an approximation of what I was seeing:



It was freaky and very menacing. I woke up when it appeared that the bridge-face was starting to approach me. *Must remember not to combine those granules with sleep deprivation. The dreams are just too scary-crazy.*

However, I was still dead-tired, and quickly fell back asleep. No more nightmarish scenes this time. Just good, deep, wholesome sleep.

When I awoke it was 6:06 PM. *Wow, I slept the whole day.*

I was now hungry. I decided to just go for a walk until I found an enticing restaurant. It didn't take but a few blocks.

On a less curvy and less steep Lombard Street, I spied a Thai restaurant in the faltering evening light. *Perfect. This should do the trick.*

The seafood platter called *The St. John Special* was delicious and plentiful. Thirty-five minutes later I was completely satiated. The Asian waitress saw my empty plate.

"Did you enjoy it, sir?"

"Yes, very much. Thank you."

"You're welcome. Glad you liked it. I had a feeling that you would pick that dish. It had its eyes on you." *What did she just say? So odd, especially after that weird dream. Maybe*

her English isn't so good. Yeah, maybe just a fumbling of pronouns.

It was now 7:07. (Yes, I know, yet another time that you only see in a psecret psociety yarn, and psecret psociety was still some eighteen years upstream from this point in time.) I saw a micro-brew pub out the window. I felt a wee thirsty for a beer, so I decided to check it out.

NoPo (slang for North Portland) Biergarten had about thirty people scattered at outdoor tables, inside booths and sunken-floor tables. I took a seat inside at the oak bar and ordered an extra-dark porter.

The tall, concave-indented, glass stein was set down on a round cardboard coaster with white and black concentric circles. I lifted the beer up to my mouth and examined the coaster more closely. *Wow, that looks just like the 'bridge eyes' in my weird dream. But, I've never been in this bar before. I've never seen these coasters anywhere before. Or, have I?*

After nursing the extra-foamy, hoppy brew for about seventeen minutes, the bartender, who was a white dude about my age with black hair and a silver mushroom necklace, began a conversation with me. I was still the only one at the bar (for some odd reason – maybe it was my lack of a shower).

“New to town?” he asked.

“Yeah, just visiting for a couple of days,” I replied.

“Visiting some friends?” He sure is curious to know.

“Uh, no, just checking out Portland for the first time. I think I'll go for a hike in Forest Park tomorrow.”

“Sage idea, man. The liberty caps (*Psilocybe semilanceata*, a psychoactive mushroom) should be out. It rained pretty good the last few nights. Just look on the north-facing grassy glades.” *Wow! That sure was nice of him. But, why would he share such info with a complete stranger. Oh yeah, I have a mushroom T-shirt on. Wake up, sport!*

I thanked him, took my last gulp of beer, and left.

As I started my walk back to the motel on Alta Avenue, an idea flew into my perforated cranium: Check out St. Johns Bridge at night.

I made a left on Syracuse Street, walked a block, and made a right on Philadelphia Avenue. I began walking up the sidewalk of the bridge's eastern incline. I only went as far as Edison Street. There, I stopped and marveled at the dark green metal towers with red lights twinkling atop the skinny dark spires.

No circular eyes could be seen in the upper part of the road deck openings. Though, it still felt ominous, even downright foreboding. *I wonder how Euler's equation fits into this scene. What a silly thought.*

After a few minutes of gazing and wondering, I marched back to my motel room. *Tomorrow should be epic.*

I watched the local news at 10:00. As the weather segment started, I began to feel drowsy. The last words I heard before falling asleep were: "High tomorrow: 71. Low morning clouds will give way to high cirrus clouds by noon. Skies will thicken up again in the evening. No rain expected until after seven o'clock. So, get out and enjoy the day, everyone." *So, enjoy the day. So, enjoy everyone. So, enjoy. So ... <zzzzz>*

I awoke at 7:34 AM, as visually announced by the red LED digits on the cheap clock radio. Curiously, I couldn't recall having any dreams. It was a good night of unbroken sleep.

While taking a shower, I wondered how the day would go. *Will I find any liberty caps? And, if I find some, what will happen if I eat too many? Will I become another wandering Portland space capsule?*

Then I looked down at the shower stall's silver drain. It had a concentric circle design. *I think I'm just noticing concentric circles because of that eerie dream. Shouldn't place so much importance on it. Just let it flow. Away.*

The motel had a free continental breakfast in the office lobby. I tossed a couple of bananas and plastic bottles of water and pineapple juice in my backpack as I ate some toast with blueberry jelly. With a paper coffee cup in hand, I commenced my two-legged journey to Forest Park. *What*

wiggedness [sic] awaits on the other shore? Eyes suppose that we shall soon find out. [sic]

The 54° F (12.2° C) misty air felt great. I was psyched. Whatever was found or lost – including my mind – this was going to be a memorable hike. I could feel my neural circuits beginning to hum as I passed under the eastern, still eyeless, tower.

The Willamette River way below was a placid, basil-green picture of what I always imagined a major river in the verdant Pacific Northwest would look like. Green on – and in – green. Voluminous viridescence.

Then a red tugboat caught my eye as it slowly headed for some docks downstream. *Quite the complimentary contrast to all of these shades of green.*

I was soon passing through the western tower's sidewalk opening. Then I noticed that I was now back over land. *Time to break on through to the forest side.*

At the T-intersection with NW Bridge Avenue, I made a left. In 222 feet (I know, that exact number seems slyly suspicious), I was at a fernicious [sic] trailhead. The Ridge Trail would be my entrance into a nebulous netherworld.

I was only on the Ridge Trail for about a thousand feet (304.8 meters) – or maybe exactly 1001 (305.1 meters) – before I noticed a lightly worn, narrow deer path on my left, leading down a mossy gulch. It looked a little slippery, yet so very inviting. *Oh, let's take this semi-secret exit, regardless of personal safety risks. Irregardlessly is a real adverb, but why should anyone proceed like that? Well, here we go.*

For the first three hundred or so feet (91 to 99 meters), I was able to walk the faint, slowly descending, completely canopied trail in a normal fashion; i.e., facing forward. But then the little trail went from a gentle wash to a rivulet. *Hello.*

I then had to face the wet, steep path and lower myself, root by root, foot by foot, hand by hand. This went on for about forty feet. Then it kind of plateaued out.

The rivulet was now a small creek with the deer path beside it (no longer in it). I followed the small stream for a couple of hundred feet (61 meters) down to a larger creek, which was

about four feet (1.22 meters) across and a foot (.3 meters) deep in the middle. There were plenty of moss-covered boulders in this creek.

I spied an easy route and carefully crossed the babbling brook without a wet misstep. Once on the other side, I took out my trusty \$2.99 compass. The creek seemed to be flowing ENE. I decided to hike downstream on a bankside bear path (perhaps the deer used it, too).

Just 80 yards (73 meters) later, I was in business. A little, grassy, north-facing glade was on my right. *Time to peruse the purlieu.*

I began to part the dewy, foot-high, emerald grass blades with my right hiking boot. Nothing of note was discovered for the first few minutes, save a colorful centipede. But then my fortunes changed with the passing of a turtle. There they were, a pair of liberty caps hiding quietly. *Ah, we've struck neural gold!*

I carefully unearthed them and gave them a pinch. Sure enough, the stalks turned blue within six minutes. *Psilocybin-containing? Check.*

I pulled the riper banana out of my backpack and ate it with the two liberty caps. The blended taste was, well, not that unpleasant. I've sure tasted worse.

I gulped down the pineapple juice and decided to turn around and follow the creek upstream. I felt deft, even if still daft. Hiking was an exhilarating breeze.

When the creek shrank to two feet in width, the bear trail merged into the boulder-filled stream. I carefully began to rock-hop upstream (just like in the novella *To Morrow Tomorrow*). The slope slowly increased, but never got so steep as to require walking on all fours.

After a hundred and fifty feet, the water was no longer visibly flowing. There were just pools of water here and there next to the jade-colored, mossy rocks.

I began stomping through the soft black muck, scaling the wash. This went on for thirteen prime minutes. My heart was really circulating the blood around now. *This is a bit of a*

workout, which is good. Good psilo-circulation. [sic] Primo cerebral infiltration.

When I had walked about two football fields (219 meters), the wash line ended at an abandoned road – now just a nice hiking trail: NW Leif Erikson Drive.

I took a water break for about ten minutes. I still felt ok. My mind was still on Earth, and so were my feet. I was upright and alright. And, strangely, I still hadn't encountered any hikers. So far it had been just a nice solitary morning hike in the Portland Verdancy. [sic]

After hiking in a generally northwest direction for 606 feet (554 meters) – I went back and measured; no, just guesstimating – I came upon a 40-something, white couple at the T-intersection with the Ridge Trail. *Speak normally. Terse answers to any questions. Don't elaborate. Don't go off on a tangent.*

They seemed deep in thought, almost like they were meditating. I decided to ask them a few path questions, before they asked me. I suddenly felt like I wasn't too zapped to converse, and I didn't want to end up in someone's backyard with vicious dogs barking and a shotgun in my face. Yeah, maybe I was already zooming. My rocket ship had most likely cleared the tower somewhere back there.

"Hello," I chirped (perhaps like a redheaded woodpecker). "Would you know where this trail goes?" I asked, thinking my voice sounded strange, almost like from another person.

The wide-brim-hatted man pointed in the direction I was headed. "This way meanders with the contours and goes all the way to Germantown Road."

"Thanks," I said, having no idea where Germantown Road was in relation to St. Johns Bridge.

The bespectacled lady picked up on my geographical uncertainty. "Do you want to go to Germantown Road?"

"I don't know; well, perhaps so. Does it go to Berlin? You know, I'm no Hamburger." *I sure hope they find that funny.*

No laughing. No response. Just an awkward silence for three seconds. The couple then looked down and shook their heads as they walked away. *Was my little joke really that bad? I would have laughed if the roles were reversed. Oh, well. Let's march on and keep our mouth shut.*

I began hiking again on leafy Leif Erikson Drive, trying to forget the odd encounter, but kept thinking: *I bet they knew I was high. Maybe they're reformed hippies. No one holds more scorn for the psyche-inebriated than the reformed ones. Oh, well. Can't win over them all.*

A bird of unknown species then screeched. *Ah, I think he or she agrees with my line thinking. Or, maybe not.*

Soon I was crossing over a small creek. One hundred and eighty feet later I was at a junction with the Hardesty Trail. I curved to the right to stay on Leif Erikson. *What if that couple report me to the park ranger? Will his or her staff be out to apprehend me? Oh, let's not get paranoid. Not now.*

I looked up at the oh-so-many-shades-of-green tree canopy as I walked. *This really is awesome. What a place and time to be alive, and to be thinking of being alive at such a place and time. Oh, what nonsense am I thinking now?*

That's when the trail started to feel like a conveyor belt. I was still walking, but it felt like I was being brought forward, like on one of those moving walkways at the airport.

Before I knew it, I was at another trail junction. To my right was NW Old Springville Road, another abandoned motor vehicle road that was now a hiking-only trail. I decided to take it, as it seemed to trend eastward, back towards the Gothic green bridge.

Then, to my surreal surprise, a house appeared to the right of the gravel trail. The hiking trail had become a neighborhood street! In fact, I was now in a small residential area (Whitwood Court). I had only been in the woods for 99 minutes, yet my mind was now soaring at 99 light-years per second.

The houses that I walked past looked like they were made of gingerbread with frosting for the trim. I expected to see Hansel and Gretel, or an evil witch, at any moment. But, I

saw no one. It was eerily uninhabited. *Has this area been abandoned?*

Then the gravel turned to asphalt. At the first house on the left I finally saw a human: a Native American young lady in blue jeans with dark hair. She was walking up the street as I was walking down.

The distance between us quickly reduced. As we approached each other, I cheerfully said, "Hi."

She quickly replied, "Oh, hell yes!" She then started laughing, almost uncontrollably. *What in the world?!*

We passed each other. I turned my head to look back at her, and she turned hers around, too. She had this crazy-as-all-of-life-on-Earth smile on her face. I just kept walking. *And, they thought I was the high-as-an-untethered-kite one? What in nature's pharmacy is she on? Or, has she been huffing the nitrous?*

Part of me absolutely wanted to follow her and continue the conversation. No, not out of primal lust, but out of an extreme curiosity. *Who is she? What is her story? Could our stories be interwoven? Would it make for a novel someday? Ah, the endless mysteries of this existence.*

Well, my saner, though much less adventurous self won out (to the detriment of this short story, it would seem; but wait – there's more). I kept marching down the street, feeling very amused – feeling exceptionally euphoric.

Then I was at another T-intersection. NW Old Springville Road ended at US 30 Bypass. I remembered – amazingly – that this was the highway that the St. Johns Bridge carried over the Willamette River.

I crossed the road without getting hit by a car, and began to walk southward on the sidewalk. My shoes felt a bit marshmallowy. [sic]

In know-time, [sic] I was at the same T-intersection I was at 2:22 ago. Yes, I was back at the bridge's western approach. *Excellent. I didn't get lost or injured.*

I curved left on the sidewalk, and began to walk across the 1931 masterwork. I looked up at the towers. *Good: no eyes!*

An overcast sky punctuated with low-flying clouds had moved in. It looked, indeed, like it would be raining at nightfall. *Still have plenty of time. Might as well take my time going back to the motel. There's no rush. Let's just peak, and take a peek, at the peak [middle] of this splendid bridge.*

I slow-walked it to the western tower. I touched the green-painted steel portal. It felt like low-voltage electricity was running through the girders. *Is there some kind of ground fault? Probably just me: I'm the ground fault.*

When I was at the halfway mark, I spotted that same red tugboat again. The river seemed to be grabbing at it. It was bobbing in the water. I focused in on the vessel. It was actually sinking. *Oh, my dearest demigod of on-time delivery! That tugboat is a goner. Hope the crew has already abandoned ship. I think so. Don't see anyone.*

I then watched the tugboat sink below the surface over the next nineteen minutes. It was an astonishing sight.

Later, back at the motel, I would learn via the 5:00 local news that the tugboat had struck some submerged, just-below-the-surface, metal pilings near the eastern tower's protective barrier wall. *That dream really was a harbinger. Should I tell anyone?*

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