

## Old Glory and Dhar

On Veterans Day, nearly 3,000 flags lined the main streets of towns across central Oregon with Redmond, aka Flag City, USA, in the lead with 1,600 stars and stripes placed by volunteers hours before that city's parade began. Throughout the region, the best of hometown parade pageantry was on full display: high school bands, Girl and Boy Scouts, the Oregon Youth Challenge Color Guard, rodeo queens and their courts, military vehicles, Mt. View High School's Navy National Defense Cadet Corps and the veterans themselves. In Madras, the Black Bear Diner offered a free meal to all who have served in the armed forces. Burns High School hosted a Veterans Assembly that included tributes along with a tasty brunch.

Veterans Day was originally [Armistice Day](#) to commemorate the truce between the allied forces and Germany signed at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 and leading to the end of World War I. In 1914, Author H.G. Wells dubbed WWI "the war to end all wars." If only, if only he'd been right. But despite, or maybe because of, the Ukraine-Russia and Israel-Palestine conflicts and other battles across the globe, on Saturday, Nov. 11, 2023, Veterans Day commemorations took place throughout the United States with the American flag front and center.

It's a flag that has long stood for a democracy founded on respect, loyalty and reason, on loving one's neighbor. But in recent years older veterans of war and life have seen Old Glory rendered less a symbol of patriotism, the emblem of team America, and more a political symbol as defined by one faction or another. From my Baby Boomer perspective, a term coined to describe the increase in birth rate after World War II, I can't help but feel the freedoms we cherish, that veterans have given their lives to protect, are in real jeopardy given the divisions among our own ranks.

I recently made good on a longstanding promise to myself: a trip to the small nation of Bhutan. My dream of visiting this tiny country nestled at the foot of the towering Himalayas was fueled by images of breathtaking natural beauty as well as Bhutan's reputation as the happiest country in the world. In 2008 the country established goodwill as a policy, adopting Gross National Happiness as a "development indicator, formalizing the country's belief that happiness is a core responsibility of government." I kid you not. "It provided the world with proof-of-concept for moving beyond GDP (Gross Domestic Product) measurement and taking a [holistic view of social development](#)," according to an article co-authored by Asian Development Bank economist Milan Thomas and Yangchen Rinzin, a fellow at Bhutan's Centre for Gross National Happiness Studies. What does that look like on a day-to-day basis? Compassion of one individual for the other, lack of self-aggrandizement, respect and caring. This is not an exaggeration.

The country's national flag, yellow and red bicolor with a dragon in the center, is displayed in Bhutan's cities, but stealing the show are the colorful Bhutanese prayer flags (dhar). They are everywhere. They dance from lines strung atop the tallest mountains, across the deepest chasms and from towering Cyprus trees. The flags festoon the steepest cliffs, surround ornate temples and stupas and are an integral feature at the Buddhist monasteries located throughout the country. The belief is by hanging the flags, the prayers they carry for happiness and freedom

from suffering are released far and wide. I returned from this trip truly inspired by a culture predicated on the good of all, a concept that shouldn't feel so foreign, so unusual.

Sometimes it takes getting out of Dodge to shake loose a new perspective. Distance or destination needn't be the determining factor. After a high desert out-and-back or a hike into the Cascades I always see and feel more fully when I return to the hub-bub of town. Admittedly on this trip I traveled crazy far to be reminded that personal happiness depends on the happiness of others and to witness firsthand that happiness as a governmental policy is possible.

I can't help but wonder what would happen if, instead of the flags we fly to noisily proclaim our divisive political positions, we respectfully flew giant prayer flags from our vehicles, releasing to the winds our wishes for mutual caring, the end of suffering, for peace at home and abroad. My bet is, if we did, we'd move mountains the size of the Himalayas on the way to victory in the campaign for compassion.