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## From Her Enchantment with Words to Her Life's Work in Journalism

Even as a small child, Melinda Benton was fascinated with writing and said she viewed it as a “fun code to figure out.” Her early interest in language grew into her life’s work as a journalism professional and educator. “I’ve never lost that enchantment with words and how they carry meaning across time, creating innumerable ripples of change as readers act upon the words they see and here.”



When she was still very young, she discovered stories were everywhere. “I didn’t have to ride my bike across town to the library each time I ran out of books to read, which was often. Every individual I knew was a million stories just waiting to be discovered. Every day held substance that could be turned into an interesting story, and to write was a way to record a piece of life to enjoy later.”

### A Budding Journalist: Discovering the Foundations of Inquiry

After her middle school started a newspaper, Benton signed up and was chosen as the editor.

“It took about two weeks for me to figure out that journalism is a lot more than turning out good, clear sentences about events; it is really about human relations and how we communicate and influence each other.”

As she continued her education, Melinda continued to write for school newspapers and to study journalism. She explained that journalism provided her with the foundations of inquiry. “All learning, after all, starts with inquiry.”

“Journalism also taught me the foundations of citizenship and about the systems that govern us, small and large. It taught me perspective, fairness, caution, empathy, control, context. It taught me how to look for the familiar in the unfamiliar and the new in the old.”

### Engaging Students in Democracy through Journalism

Eventually, Benton’s journey led to a position as a newspaper reporter. Later, she began teaching journalism to college students. She has been teaching journalism and media-related courses for twenty-seven years. Seventeen of those years have been as an associate professor of journalism at Umpqua Community College. “One of my greatest challenges is trying to prepare students to engage in

their own democracy before it fails by studying, analyzing, engaging, and writing on topics that affect their future.”

“I am so proud of my students. Together, they have won many awards, but more importantly, my students have learned how to find their own voice and how to speak for others in matters that affect the



Student Joyce Blair with Melinda

health and happiness of their communities. They have learned that to have a working world, they must contribute their own work.”

### A Journalist’s Pet Peeve

“One of my pet peeves is someone using social media to communicate, often with unsubstantiated and illogical conclusions, and then claiming that the media can’t be trusted anymore. The person is literally using media to broadcast false information while telling others to distrust the media.”

“Every time I hear someone say that no one should believe the media, I always ask, “Which one?” We are being led to distrust too broadly or to trust only in our own echo chambers. This is good for fascism, not good for democracy or freedom.”

“No matter what you think of the media outlets you’re frustrated with, maligning all media is not a good thing. Reputable journalism is America’s system for public oversight of government agencies, and these agencies have proved time, and again they desperately need third-party oversight in order to act fairly and efficiently.”

Benton explains that one of the problems many people have with media is a result of human nature. She says we have a tendency to be rather tribal. This “makes belonging to a group more attractive than the hard work of analyzing information...and we, as a people, tend to over-simplify.”

### A Strong Work Ethic and a Dream for the Future

Melinda lives on a ranch of about 130 acres. She has a couple of horses and a pasture for her cows.

Because of her busy teaching schedule, it has been a challenge for her to take care of all the work on the ranch that is needed. Nonetheless, “I was raised with a strong work ethic, and work actually makes me happy.”



As she looks ahead, Melinda says she wants to keep her brain engaged as much as possible. “When my brain is engaged, I feel more alive.” She plans to enjoy watching her children continue to grow in their own careers. She is also thinking about moving into community service-related work after she retires.

### Advice for Others

“Make room for what makes you happy. Plan for your future instead of responding to your present. Sometimes that means little sacrifices initially in order for a better payoff later, but it will be worth the work. Now, I need to figure out how to better follow my own advice!”

### Too Much Sun and Not Enough Water?

As we age, our ability to recognize thirst tends to diminish. After spending an afternoon gardening in the sun, not getting enough water can lead to dehydration. According to the [Cleveland Clinic](#), early signs of dehydration can include dry mouth, fatigue, dizziness, and muscle cramps. The [Mayo Clinic](#) warns that dehydration could lead to serious health



problems, including urinary and kidney problems, seizures, heat cramps, or heatstroke.

It is important to make sure we are getting enough water. Recommendations vary on how much we need. An article for [Healthline](#) indicates following the 8 x 8 rule (8 x 8 ounces) is usually sufficient and easy to remember. Let's stay hydrated this summer!

## Healthcare Sticker Shock

Fidelity estimated that in 2019, the average retired couple at 65 would spend \$285,000 on healthcare costs of relying on original Medicare for their health expenses. This estimate does not include long term health expenses. Consider your options.

### Medicare Advice

*By Cindy Eastman  
Independent Insurance Advisor  
[Blue Pacific Insurance](#)*

What's the best advice I can give right now for people who are going onto Medicare, or possibly already on Medicare?

I'd recommend against clicking on ads or calling phone numbers advertised and giving out personal information.

My recommendation is to talk to a local insurance advisor who will give you factual information so that you can make the best decisions yourself. And, for people already on Medicare, review your options at least once a year.



Remember, too, that if you're turning 65 this year, and will be going onto Medicare for the first time, there are a lot of great options to choose from.

With our current COVID-19 crisis, that may seem quite difficult, but it doesn't have to be. I'm

offering to meet people on Zoom and the telephone so that people can get all the information they need. Zoom is very simple to use, and I can walk you through it if you've never used it before.

If you'd like to set up a Zoom chat to ask your Medicare questions, I can be reached at: Cindy Eastman - 541-733-8383. Take care, and we'll get through this, everyone!

## Who is on Your "Who to Call" List?

For years, I stuffed all of my bank statements and similar documents into my file drawers. Then I learned that there was a way to organize all my essential documents into a single binder. I also learned what to save, what to shred, and what to replace as a result of the [Playbook Process](#).

I now know where to find everything. However, when I'm gone, the person who receives my Playbook binder may not know who to contact about information I've organized for them. That's why I'm in the process of creating a "most valuable contact" list for my Playbook binder.

In our [April newsletter](#), Ben James, CFA, CFP, and



founder of Elevate Wealth Advisors offered some sound advice. He said, "Regardless of household income, we all need to focus on what's important, eliminate the clutter, and be able to communicate vital information to the right people at the right time."

To help with communication, Ben offers a .55 second video for developing a "most valuable contact" (MVC) list for your financial matters. You can also download an MVC template for your own use.

To watch short informative videos on the Playbook Process, and to see the MVC video, [click here](#). Also watch for the soon-to-be-released video, "Company-Structured Statements."

## How Can We Trust the News?

As responsible citizens, it is important for all of us to stay informed. But with so much contradictory information available and from so many different sources, how do any of us know what to believe? I asked an expert for her advice on how to be a better consumer of news. Here are some of her tips.

### How to Distinguish Between Credible and Questionable News

By Melinda Benton,  
Associate Professor of Journalism



We have millions of stories every day to choose from – choose wisely.

- Look for authors who quote from reputable, primary documents and provide you the links back to those documents.
- Begin with questions, not conclusions, and hold off on the punditry.
- Check the “about” tab on a website – you should see a location for the publication.
- Look for stories about perspectives you haven’t previously considered which are written in an explanatory voice without a persuasive tone.
- Double-check information before you publish it yourself. Especially avoid re-broadcasting memes with unsubstantiated pieces of information meant to create outrage or disgust. Often, these are created by bots for the sole purpose of destabilizing our society.

For more of Melinda’s suggestions, [click here](#).

## Unrestricted

By  
Helen Laurence,  
Oregon Poet



vision unrestricted from dusky asters

to the distant Cascades

layer on layer opened by showers

we accept joy

pouring

into brimming senses

autumn ablaze where breezes stir

cottonwoods flaming gold into

skies piled purple on gray on blue

we twirl to wisdom

spilling

promises in seasons

### **The Power of Optimism**

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