

# Blockade of freeway struck blow for the common man

By Jeff Duewel  
of the Daily Courier

On a sunny August Sunday in 1956, a group of wronged property owners repossessed a 16½-foot wide and 200 foot long strip of land crossing Highway 99 between Glendale and Azalea. In the process, they struck a blow for the common man.

The Aug. 12 event became known as the "Stumbo Stand-off" as between 200 and 600 cars, trucks, buses and even a circus were stopped by the Stumbo brothers — Josephine County residents Harry, Allan and Robert — and their cousin Clair Stumbo of Jackson County.

While some of the Stumbos carried weapons, they put up a sign warning drivers that they were approaching "private property, permission to pass revocable at any time." They distributed handbills apologizing for the inconvenience and explained that "this strip of land stands unique in the annals of Oregon history." Without bothering to buy it, or even ask permission to use it, the Oregon Highway Department had built its super highway across the top of land purchased by their grandfather, Sam Stumbo, around 1900.

To stop the state from taking adverse possession of the property, Sam Stumbo's heirs had to assert their ownership before a 10-year time limit expired. Oregon State Police sent riot squads from Grants Pass and Roseburg to break up the protest, but arrived too late. The Stumbos had made their point in less than an hour.

"The highway commission has always pushed the little guy around here in Southern Oregon and it occurred to us that if we're paying taxes on the property we may as well take it over," Robert Stumbo told the Daily Courier.

The state later admitted its error and unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate a purchase. The Stumbos decided to subdivide the property and sell parcels of the strip that were two inches long and two inches wide, making it a truly "publicly owned" highway. Using its power of eminent domain, the state filed to condemn the



Allen J. Reed photo

Harry Stumbo, front, and cousin Clair Stumbo, right, place a sign on Highway 99 during the "Stumbo Stand-off." Allan Stumbo is at far left.

The highway commission has always pushed the little guy around here in Southern Oregon.

**Robert Stumbo**  
took on state in standoff

property.

The Stumbos argued that they should be awarded the market value of the property on the date the state filed for condemnation in 1956, which would take their subdivision sales into account. They asked for \$250,274 and sought \$25,000 in legal fees. However, a Douglas County jury ruled that the Stumbos were only entitled to the strip's value in 1946, when the highway department initially trespassed and began building the road over it. The Stumbos were awarded \$125 plus interest. In 1960, the Oregon Supreme Court upheld the ruling.

The incident was featured in an episode of the ABC television series "Bus Stop" in 1962. The episode was based on an article in True magazine called "The Stubborn Stumbos and the Troublesome Turnpike." The Stumbo brothers were portrayed by Don Megowan, Claude Akins and Earl Holliman.

The so-called "stubborn" Stumbos have all died, but live on in Oregon folklore. A road in Azalea where the strip meets Interstate 5 bears the family name.



Cave Queen Joan Momsen and a band of Oregon Cavemen welcome then-Gov. Mark Hatfield, seated in backseat, at the ribbon-cutting ceremony opening Interstate 5 through Grants Pass in 1962.

# Traffic through downtown 'dead' with opening of I-5

By Shaun Hall  
of the Daily Courier

Joan Momsen remembers the day Interstate 5 was opened through Grants Pass.

She was the reigning "Cave Queen," and remembers the ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by Gov. Mark Hatfield, who dutifully donned appropriate Caveman headgear, complete with horns.

What began with the Federal-aid Highway Act of 1956 came to fruition in the foothills overlooking Grants Pass on June 1, 1962. That's when a section of the freeway between Grants Pass and Rogue River was opened.

Momsen's aunt Ina that day was the local agent for the Greyhound bus company, which donated use of a bus to haul dignitaries up to the freeway. The assemblage met between the two main freeway interchanges, overlooking the city.

Greyhound seemed to never give anything away, but they did that special day.

"It really was unlike them," recalled Momsen, who also worked at the depot and who went on to teach history at Grants Pass High School. Gov. Hatfield drove up that day in the back of a convertible limousine. Eventually, he would don "Chief Bighorn" headgear and ham it up for the cameras — praising the freeway's engineering as well as promoting the area's tourism.

The Daily Courier reported in that day's paper, "Noting the clear, sunny weather, Governor Hatfield remarked for the benefit of out-of-state visitors, 'we have weather like this 366 out of 365 days a year.'"

The governor, noting that the freeway drastically cut the number of roadway curves through the old route, also pushed highway safety by touting a statewide speed limit and urging a law to force suspected drunken drivers to submit to sobriety tests or face sanctions.

The headline in the Courier that day read, "Hatfield Wants Safety Tightened on Highways," with an accompanying smaller headline reading, "Freeway Link Opened." The main picture showed the governor flanked by Boatnik Queen Juli Sharp and acting Miss Medford Joan Calahan.

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The dignitaries came from surrounding cities and counties. On hand were mayors Mayor Charles Gill Jr. of Grants Pass and Larry Sheehan of Rogue River. Chamber of Commerce President Tyler Cubb. County Commissioners Louis Ringuette and Bruce Davidson were there, but Commissioner Raymond Lathrop — a big highway proponent — was seriously ill.

The Courier reported comments from Mayor Gill "describing the freeway as an exemplification of the beauty of the Pacific Northwest ... and expressing pride in Oregon as a state that 'strengthens its lifelines.'"

Also reported: "After the ceremony, Oregon Cavemen, headed by Chief Bighorn Mel Legler and Cave Queen Joan Momsen, with former state senator, Don Cameron, as chief spokesman, insisted that the governor view the high-

way through their own surveyor's transit, a contraption of gnarled branches forming a rough tripod, and had Governor Hatfield cut the Caveman's 'ribbon,' which consisted of bones strung on a rope."

The next day's paper carried the headline, "Freeway Opening Cuts Traffic Over 6th, 7th." One officer said downtown seemed "dead" and that motel parking lots seemed less full than usual.

As for Momsen, she worked at the bus depot for another decade. Her mother, Beulah, had been agent there from 1933 until Joan was born in 1942. Aunt Ina (McCarthy) then took over and ran things until the 1970s.

The bus depot, opened in 1939, was at the northwest corner of I and Seventh streets. A new one was opened in 1968 at I and Eighth streets. That building is now part of the east end of the Daily Courier building. The current depot is at Agness and Spalding avenues.

Momsen served two years as Cave Queen, and two other years on the court, travelling often in the region to share "the blood from the sabretoothed tiger" as a community envoy at special events.

"It was very, very interesting," she recalled. "I was constantly crossing the path of dignitaries."

Momsen worked full time for the bus company until 1971, then part time while getting a masters degree from Southern Oregon College. She taught at Rogue Community College starting in 1976 and taught at Grants Pass High School from 1980 until 2008. She is active in the Josephine County Historical Society.

# Interstate bit into traveling times

By Shaun Hall  
of the Daily Courier

Jack Ross remembers what it was like to drive the old Pacific Highway from near Medford to Salem, in the days before Interstate 5.

"My gosh, it would take all day," said the retired Oregon Department of Transportation worker. "It was a bear cat."

Back then, Ross drove an "old wreck of a state truck."

"It was all two-lane road," he said. "If you got behind a truck, that's where you stayed."

He called the section of the old highway from Mount Sexton to Canyonville "just a continuous curve."

Ernie Strawn, another ODOT retiree, remembers construction of I-5 through Medford, and how ice had to be melted so stripping could be painted on the new road.

He recalls the freeway reaching the California border in "'67 or '68." It first opened as a two-way road using the freeway's northbound lanes.

Both men still live in the Rogue Valley. Now, some 50 years after I-5 was built through Josephine County, a massive

bridge replacement program is under way, the first since the freeway's construction. Bridges at the Merlin and Grants Pass Parkway interchanges are being rebuilt, as is one over Beacon Drive. Work is set to be done this spring or early summer.

## Interstate 5 timeline

**1956:** Federal highway act passes, calling for a 13-year nationwide highway improvement program, including a "national system of interstate and defense highways."

**1957-58:** A new four-lane highway opens between Grants Pass and Jumpoff Joe Creek Road.

**1961-62:** Freeway opens from Grants Pass to near Rock Point, in the Gold Hill area.

**1963-64:** Survey under way on the last section of I-5 to be built from Mount Sexton to Canyonville.

**1965-66:** Construction completed from Mount Sexton to Canyonville.

Source: Oregon Department of Transportation, biennial reports to the Oregon State Highway Commission.

# THE MUSIC SHOP

## Enduring the Test of Time



In 1909 the Daily Courier was housed in the building that is now the location of the Music Shop at 413 S.E. 6th St



The Music Shop as it looks today.

The Music Shop is the longest surviving music store in Grants Pass. Pearl Jones and family have been the proprietors for over 49 years.

Looking for a means to support her three children, and wanting to work for herself, Pearl bought the business in 1961. It was located on "H" Street at that time. Within a short time, Pearl, with the help of lots of



The stockholders of the Music Shop in 1961. From left to right: Peggy, Grant, Scot and Pearl Jones

The stockholders of the Music Shop in 2002. From left to right: Scot, Pearl, Peggy and Grant

friends, moved the business 'around the corner' to its current location on 6th Street. It was literally a weekend parade of people donating their time, walking with boxes and filling their pickups that completed the move and had her open for business the following Monday.

The name "Music Shop" goes back to 1928 and it was always locally owned

and operated. That tradition continues as Pearl and her children run the business today. In fact, Pearl's grandchildren are beginning to be groomed to run the business in the future.

The Music Shop originally sold sheet music, records and musical instruments, but now the focus is on car stereos, home audio and video components, pre-wiring residential construction and vintage guitars.

49 years experience in customer service is the added value you receive when you do business with them. And their knowledge and expertise is free!

The building that houses the Music Shop was

the home of the Daily Courier near the turn of the century until the Daily Courier moved into their new building in 1949. What the building was used for from 1949 until 1961 is unknown, although Pearl believes it may have been a restaurant. The Music Shop moved into the building in 1961 and a 1980 remodel included a new store front and a completed second floor to display the home entertainment equipment.

Pearl's business philosophy has always been customer service. She believes she has been successful by bringing quality music into her customers' lives. She says "word of mouth" is one of her strongest assets. Stop in and say hello to Pearl and family at 413 S.E. 6th St. Her phone number is 541-476-3389. She is there six days a week!



The stockholders of the Music Shop in 2010. Clockwise from center: Pearl, Peggy, Zack, Scot, Keaton and Grant

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