

Dear Friends,

The transition from summer to fall feels especially poignant this year, as I prepare for my last few months at OJMCHE. My personal emotions may be jumbled, but ultimately I am beaming about our accomplishments this past year.

I moved to Portland from Toronto in 1986, following my spouse, Steve Wasserstrom, who was starting a teaching position. I assumed that we would stay for two years and then return to the east coast. But we fell in love with Portland and as the years went by became more and more entrenched in the life of the city. I worked for a decade at OMSI, the science museum and started at the Oregon Jewish Museum when it was barely a speck – it was, in fact, a museum without walls for a number of years before achieving its first physical space.

I vividly remember my first museum job, a summer position in the decorative arts department at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. I was so nervous for the interview that I stayed up all night reading Janson's *History of Art*, sure they would ask me obscure questions about Renaissance artists. In fact the first question I was asked was whether or not I owned steel toed boots! That summer I moved objects from one storage room to another, in preparation for a renovation. It wasn't especially glamorous but I simply loved every minute of it.

Of course career paths are often predicated on personal circumstances -- my career in decorative arts – I was keen on 19th century American decorative arts – took a 180 degree turn when I moved west to Portland, first, as I mentioned,

working at the science museum, and then deciding that the potential of working to build Oregon's nascent Jewish museum was too good to pass up.

So I'll fast forward nearly two and half decades of what has to have been one of the greatest career opportunities ever – so much of our work at the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education is life affirming and—speaking for myself—immensely gratifying.

All that being said, museums certainly face exceptional challenges these days and it would be foolish to pretend otherwise. I'll just take one minute to dig into this a bit

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We are today in an era of almost limitless information and disinformation. Yet the encouraging news is that museums are highly valued for their expertise and authority – a recent AAM survey showed that museums are considered the most trustworthy source of information in the country, rated higher than local papers, nonprofits researchers, the U.S. government, or academic researchers. And I remember when Ford Bell was head of the AAM and proudly reported that more people visit museums than attend baseball games.

But we cannot take this authority lightly. We have the obligation to instill into our visitors and especially the next generations to question non-fact-based news, never to ignore doubt just because it is easier to do so.

Today, the prime educational imperative of our museum has never been more necessary. The political environment – national and international – continues to frighten, to fracture, to deafen, and to distract. BUT our museums are truly safe spaces, calm and quiet refuges, that serves wide swaths of communities.

I want to cheer a milestone: community support – YOUR support – enabled us to expand into a new space, where we display our newest core exhibition, *Human Rights After the Holocaust*. The exhibition permanently commits OJMCHE – founded on democratic ideals and a Jewish vision of a pluralistic world – to illuminate the saga of human rights since the Holocaust

In the exhibition, we ask, how do you turn hope into action and provide numerous inspiring stories of individuals who have found ways to make positive change. And if you will indulge me – perhaps because I AM retiring – I'll use a sports metaphor, said by a fellow Canadian, Wayne Gretzky: *"I skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it's been."* So, as I prepare to end my tenure as OJMCHE's director, I am confident that the legacy that we have created TOGETHER will likewise continue. Ours is a shared legacy that testifies to our hope, that we can all work together to create our better future.