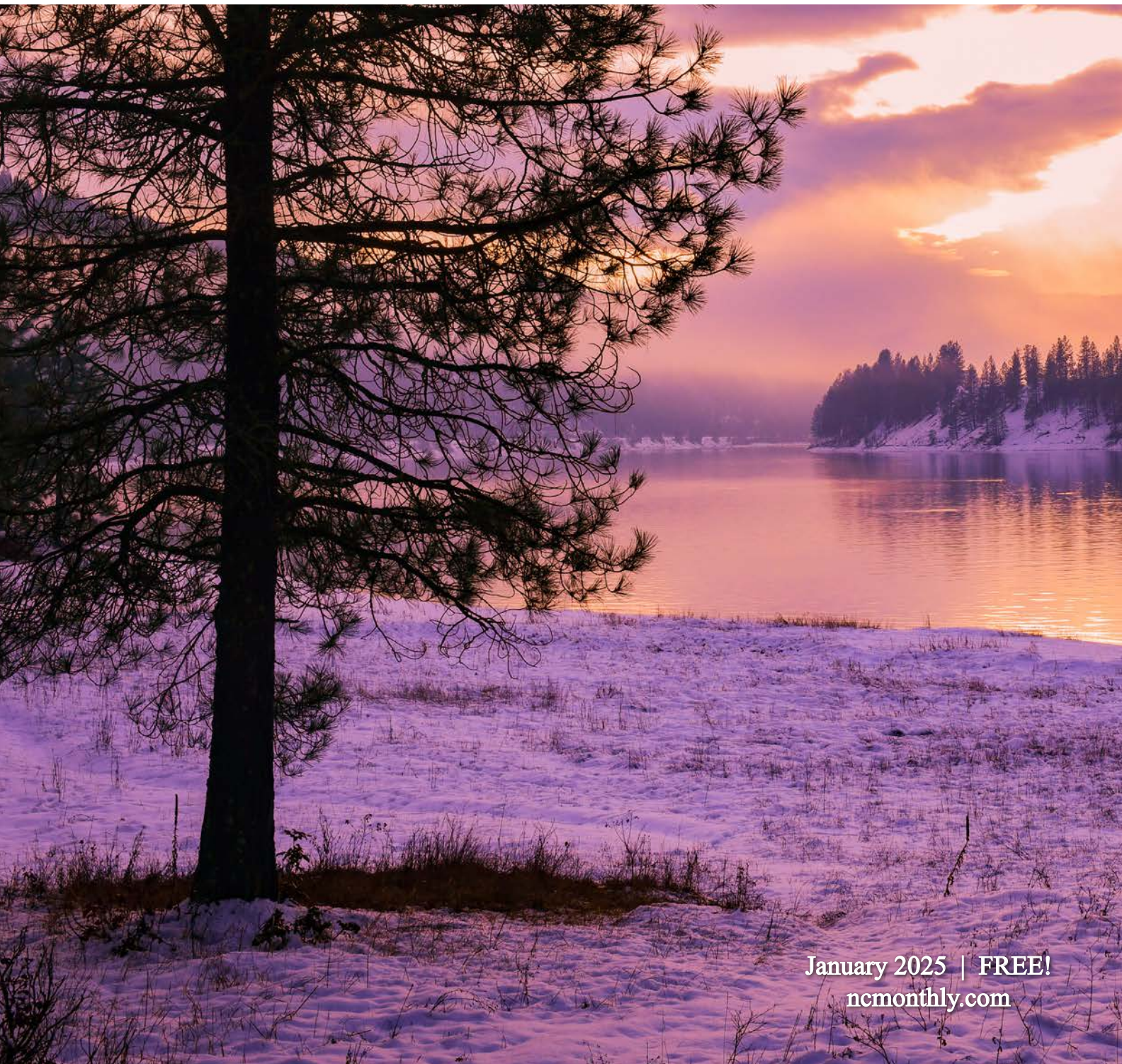




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By Gabriel Cruden

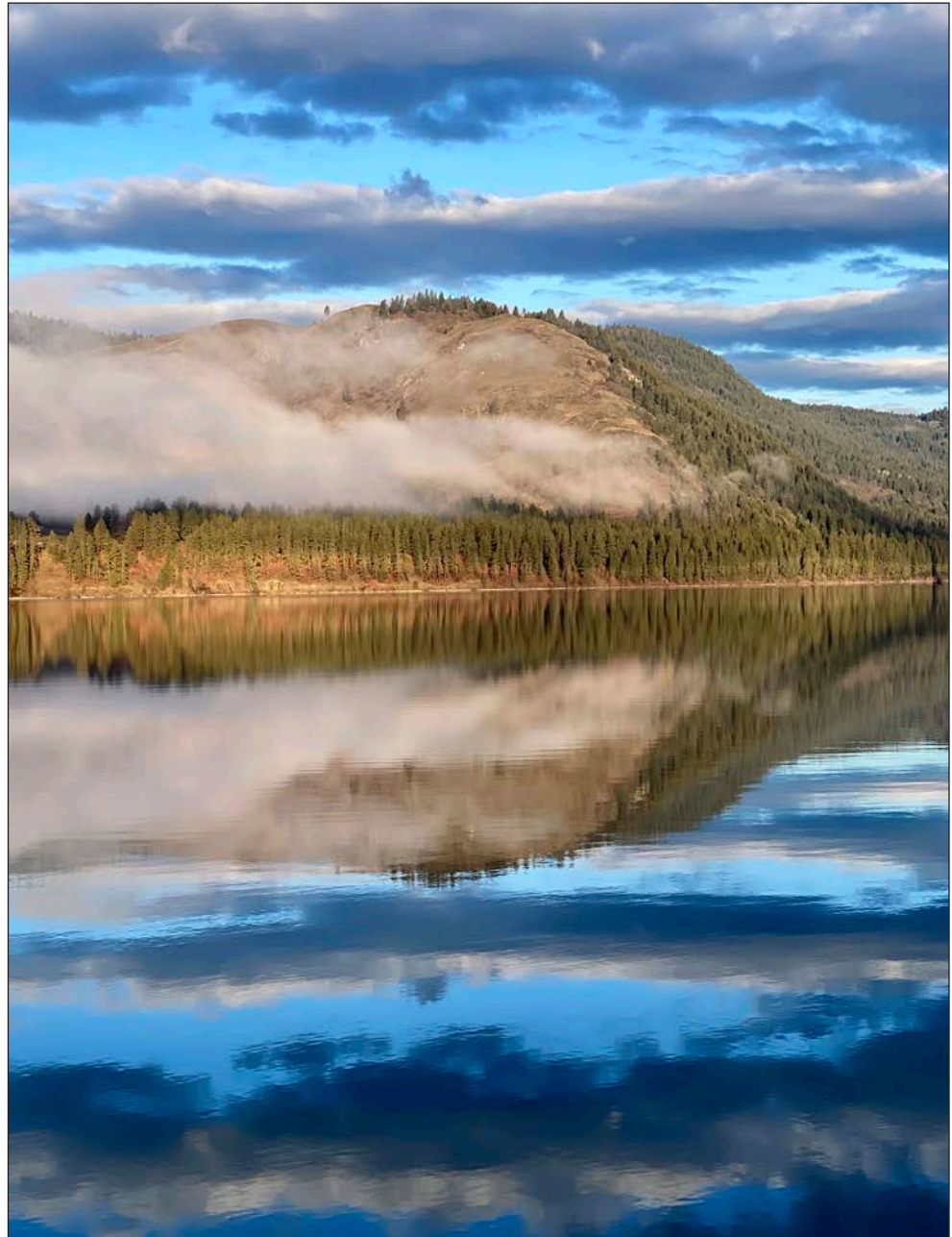
As we step into 2025, and the advice-givers share their wisdom and encouragements to people setting resolutions for the new year, I have noticed some themes emerge: small steps lead to big results; constancy is the key, even if it just means simply showing up; and good nutrition, moving your body, and getting plenty of sleep all are fundamentally supportive.

I like those. Having taken on a significantly larger workload in 2024, with additional publications to nurture and bring back to vitality, it has been challenging to be patient at times. I am grateful to our advertisers and to the wider community for their enthusiasm, including through feedback and subscriptions. I am grateful to my small team for all they do to make it happen. And I am grateful to my family for their unwavering support and willingness to pitch in.

Amidst the daily work, it can feel overwhelming and untenable at times, and as though nothing is getting done well enough or fast enough. But, stepping back, it is readily apparent that progress is being made. And for that, I am enormously grateful to all involved and proud of what we are accomplishing.

In my reflection on these topics, preparatory to writing this column, I made some tea and was rather delighted to notice the quote on the tea bag string tag, attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson: “The creation of

a thousand forests is in one acorn.” Applying that intention and attention toward an envisioned future, whether it is a New Year’s resolution or reviving a region’s community newspaper, seems to require the same stuff. Small steps leading to big results, consistently showing up, and taking care of one’s health along the way.



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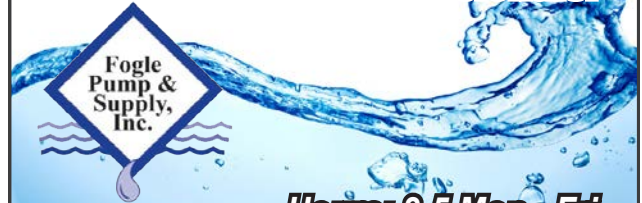
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Place I Like Lying On When Sleeping

- JOHN ODELL, allthelandandsea.wixsite.com/wordsofwords

A Note from the Publisher

The *North Columbia Monthly* is a free monthly magazine distributed throughout northeastern Washington and is a vehicle for sharing stories that we can relate to, imagine, or feel. It is about *where and how we live*. In emphasizing these kinds of stories, it is my hope that the idea of connection, common ground, and community will be infused into our consciousness and become integral to what we choose to strive for, and what is considered the norm.

I believe that we can all have different perspectives, different viewpoints, different ways of being, *and* I believe that we can find connection and build community around the things we share in common. Thank you for reading. I hope you feel enriched for having done so.

~ Gabriel

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Tackling the Beginner's Mind

By Christine Wilson

"We look at the world once, in childhood. The rest is memory." ~ Louise Gluck

"The sun is new each day." ~ Heraclitus

"Fearful thoughts are phantoms of the mind." ~ Rumi

"You're a pretty human being. When it all comes crashing down, Try to understand your meaning. No one said it would be easy. This living, it ain't easy. ... And everything you need is here. Everything you fear is here and it's holding you up." ~ Cloud Cult

*"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."
~ Shunryō Suzuki*

*"Our view of reality is like a map with which to negotiate the terrain of life."
~ Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled**

*"To truly be committed to a life of honesty, love and discipline, we must be willing to commit ourselves to reality." ~ John Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame That Binds You**

Stubborn is our loyalty to our early view of the world. January is a time many of us think about breaking out of old patterns, but it is also often linked with cynicism about those plans. After a few circles around the sun, the intractable nature of our old patterns can become pretty clear. However, I refuse to give up. My own personal progress may be slow on certain topics, but how about if we just call it incremental? On this turn of the New Year, I am thinking about my next personal aspiration. It's more of an un-aspiration, actually.

I am aspiring to get good at doing nothing for long periods of time.

When people, as quoted by Cloud Cult, would say that "this living, it ain't easy," I thought they were talking exclusively about such things as managing pain, coping with breakups, or quitting smoking. I quit smoking 30 cigarettes a day when I was 24 years old, and it was incredibly hard. I understand that kind of "not easy."

But doing nothing? Yikes!

Taking in our real options in each present moment is part of our life's work. We sometimes see those options through a glass darkly. Sometimes people come to believe that they ARE the symptoms from their past. It is not uncommon for people to think that their long-standing anxiety is necessary to achieve success. Part of our loneliness epidemic is caused by the default of assuming nefarious intentions in people. Loyalty to an intractable family pattern of failure can lead to giving up. I could go on, but you get the idea. Our past is not our inevitable future. My over-achievement pattern was ingrained by the time I started kindergarten. I was a gifted five-year-old when it came to that!

Shunryō Suzuki's quote about the beginner's mind used to feel annoying, to tell you the truth. I liked thinking of myself as the expert on my life. It was comforting. Granted,

when something went sideways, I was a little confused, but I could write it off as the vagaries of life, definitely not something I could do anything about. That was not a helpful variety of expertise. I have come to appreciate the expertise of actual experts, which includes people in the field of psychology, friends who have pointed out where I have gotten stuck, meditation experts, and clients over the years whose healing journeys I have benefited from.

When I heard Scott Peck describe our life map as a living document, I started to realize we can do some of our own cartography. It feels magical, albeit sometimes uncomfortable, to realize that I can rest in each moment with the mind of a beginner, seeing each precious moment as new. When I forget, I can be reminded by the rock on which I have written "nothing is written in stone." The world will not come to an end if I sit still.

There are at least two qualifiers

Random Acts of Community

to this “beginner’s mind” business. One is that, even with the greatest clarity of thought and the strongest “living fiercely in the moment with great curiosity” intention, life happens. Sometimes the best we can do with our beginner’s mind is figure out how we are going to handle the crushing moments outside our control. “Life,” as John Lennon sang, “is what happens while you are making other plans” (a thought first seen in print in 1957). Some people prefer: “Humans plan. God laughs.”

The second qualifier is about fear. The “phantoms of the mind” are mistaken experts, or at least messages that are pointing us to old patterns rather than present danger. In *The Gift of Fear*, Gavin de Becker made the case that fear is protective, a message from our body to get us to pay attention. There are legitimate things to be afraid of. If I am driving to the ski hill on icy roads, my “spidey sense” needs to be on alert. When we are around a person who does not have our back, but who has some kind of authority over us, it makes sense to be cautious. Beginner’s mind is not a version of naiveté.

We all have our own “phantoms of the mind,” which aren’t just fears but also habits we have accumulated. They may have helped us at the time they were being written into our map but are not serving us now. When I worked full time and was raising children, part of which was as a single mom, I needed to be a multi-tasking flurry of activity. It got the kids fed, the bills paid, my parenting skills honed, and the house stocked with supplies. Now, I am in the season of life where it is nerve-rattling to live that way. Actually, it was nerve-rat-

tlng then too, but I did not understand the beginner’s mind as well.

I have fewer demands on my time, but my brain still wants to be on warp speed, accomplishment mode. When a car that has been shooting down the highway at 60 miles per hour comes to a sudden stop, the bodies in the car are still going 60. I feel like my brain is that body. If I had a mental airbag, I would immediately be in a “I am here and this is now” position.

What that metaphorical slam into stillness has accomplished is just the start of the work. It is getting my attention. I had developed expertise in getting five things done at once. Instead, what is required of me now is catching myself at warp speed, stopping to breathe, picking one

thing to do, and doing that. Rinse and repeat.

As a first step, I am seeing how long I can sit and read without leaping up to “accomplish something.” I’ve gotten to five minutes so far. Even that is remarkably difficult. My brain starts listing out what I could achieve. It never occurred to me that doing nothing was a worthy achievement. With purposeful practice, I hope to be sitting still for a full hour by next year at this time.

I wish us all luck in our adventures in the beginner’s mind. This day really is the first day of the rest of our lives.

Christine Wilson is a psychotherapist in private practice in Colville and can be reached at christineallenwilson@gmail.com or 509-690-0715.

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Dinner with Tucker and Other Stories

By Dr. Barry Bacon, MD

A teacher from a nearby town called our Hope Street director and said her third graders would like to do something for homeless people. What could they bring? Do they need clothes? Blankets? Food? Socks? In the conversation that followed, Teresa mentioned the pressing needs that people experience when they live on the streets. The teacher in turn told her of the questions the children raised. “Do homeless people have children?” “Can we bring them toys?” “Why do they have dogs? Do they need dog food?” And other such pressing issues that enter the beautiful minds of children.

On a Friday morning in December, they arrived, two vans full of them. Looking curiously, silently, and wonderingly at the people and the Rest Stop; viewing the kitchen, the bathrooms, the tables and storage areas. “Whoa!” one exclaimed upon viewing all of the donated, day-old donuts.

Teresa and Hope Street volunteers spoke with the children, who asked things that stirred in us. Was anyone they loved homeless? A girl raised her hand. “My grandma,” she murmured. I nodded. The conversation

changes when it’s about someone you love. Did they understand why it’s important to be kind? What caused them to think of people suffering in this way and try to help them? “We thought maybe they would like it. It might make them happy,” one of them responded timidly. I liked her answer. Kindness is so powerful. It can change the world.

We ran out to the vans, unloaded their donations, piled them in front of the Rest Stop, and took some pictures. Guests in the Rest Stop smiled at the children and thanked them for their gifts. A couple more photos and they were off again. Once a quarter their teacher chooses a community service project. We’re glad they chose us this time.

It got me thinking, why does kindness seem so rare? I notice those who are kind. They stick out and get my attention. I remember them long after their actions or words are finished.

There’s a young guy I know named Tucker. He and his wife got it in their heads to do something kind, maybe have a feast for those who don’t usually get invited. Maybe a Christmas dinner. Create a beautiful atmo-

sphere, good food, serve them, and give unexpected kindness.

On Saturday night not long ago, that’s what he and some friends pulled off. Tables were set, decorations hung, a Christmas tree decorated, and gifts wrapped and in their place (pictured at right). Donations from community members who caught the vision. I stood in the silence of that place before the guests arrived and tried to put myself in their place. What does it feel like to have someone make dinner just for you, just because? Maybe it’s embarrassing, just a bit. Maybe you hope you wouldn’t be noticed because, well, you are in a place you never thought you would be, cold, sick, ragged around the edges, unwashed, and humiliated by people driving by and shouting epithets at you. Remembering when life was good.

At the dinner, I decided to sit down and share the meal. There was plenty of help, lots of food, and a couple of chairs available. The man next to me introduced himself and I recognized him. He’d lost his newborn daughter a few years ago. I knew his story, but I sat and listened as he filled in the details from the last time we met until now. He wears a special vial around his neck to remember and hold close to him his infant girl.

I’m not justifying any of the mistakes he made since that event. But I do understand how life can crumble underneath you. The death of a child shakes you to your core. You don’t know how to put one foot in front of another. Some of us find our way; some of us crash and burn for a time. I encouraged him and told him I believed in him and hoped that his

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family is put back together. I know it's hard work, but he is capable.

When you feel like garbage, the last thing you want to do is show yourself to someone you respect. You just want to hide. The last thing you want is for someone to point out the obvious, that you are a trainwreck, that you stink, that you need to get your life together. On this day, at Christmas dinner with Tucker and his friends, I sensed that this was the time to sit and listen. It was a day for encouragement, for laughter, and for giving an unexpected kindness to some folks who often receive a clear message that they are not wanted, they are not welcome, they don't belong.

Teresa is asking random facts of the audience, who have to give the right answer in order to go up and pick out a gift from under the tree. "What is the largest desert in the world? How many chambers does a dog's heart have? How many time

zones does Russia have?" Our guests are laughing, poking fun at each other, and arguing with the answers. I look around the room and there are smiles on every face. In the end, everyone has two gifts and a filled stocking to take home, wherever that may be.

Tucker is winding down the event, and folks are leaving with gobs of food left over to give away to friends and family. Some leave on bicycles, bags tied on the handlebars. Some walk to their destinations, hidden away from sight. Some receive rides to the warming center, the men's shelter, the crisis mental health facility, the homeless camp.

We talk as we ride to their destinations about life, their safety, their concerns and plans, and how they survive. "I'm doing well," a woman in her 60s told me. "I live in that tent over there. I have five sleeping bags I pile on top of me at night so I keep warm." "I have a small heater that I

use," said a man in his 40s. "I'm a veteran, but I've been waiting for years for housing. I built a brick base for my stove and put it on a brake drum and it works pretty well." Ingenious at surviving, they live in tents, campers, vehicles and wait for answers that rarely seem to come.

I'm driving back to help out with the clean-up after dinner. Tucker and his friends haven't fixed everything. The poverty is still there. The mental illness, personal trauma, addiction, and medical conditions. But Tucker and his team are saying something important. "We see you. We noticed you. We can't fix everything, but we see your suffering, and we are inviting you to the party."

Dr. Barry Bacon has lived and practiced family medicine in Colville for nearly 30 years, working in small, rural hospitals in Washington state, teaching family medicine, and working on health disparities in the U.S. and Africa.

Here & Now

By Tina Wynecoop

“The place you are in seems to be your own best book to read.”

~ Patrick Twohy

Perhaps you’ve heard of Harvey Manning, who writes trail guidebooks about “local wanderings” in the Pacific Northwest. He’s a Washingtonian with a lot of wisdom. I particularly like his philosophy, which his publisher notes, is his strong belief in staying put and exploring one’s home place. “Generally, people should stay home,” Manning writes, “forget gaining a little knowledge about a lot and strive to learn a lot about a little.”

I’d say this philosophy pretty much jives with ours. Judge and I can plan, prepare, and leave on a trip to somewhere – say Seattle, Boise, Nelson, B.C., Boston, or campouts in our region

– and invariably return in 32 hours feeling satisfied, enriched, filled up, and glad to turn into our driveway.

Maybe the quick turnaround is influenced by not having caregivers for our chickens. Maybe staying two nights in hotels is one night too many. Maybe the distant restaurants we visit have satisfied our yen for good meals. For sure, home is the dearest place on Earth and most likely the reason we’ve stayed here since October 1976.

Let me share what I think Manning calls the “a lot about a little” – our relationship with the Rocky Mountain junipers and a Townsend’s solitaire.

The morning of November 21, 2024, we heard the clear notes of the Townsend’s solitaire. We have been awaiting the bird’s return to its winter ground, or, I should say, winter perch atop its usual spot, the over-140-year-old crabapple tree growing on this former homestead. The male and female adult solitaire are indistinguishable, but calling any creature “it” seems disrespectful. We have always thought our wintering bird was a “he” until recently learning that both sexes have the same strong territorial behaviors.

We keep a “yard” list of the bird species who either nest, winter, or fly over this piece of Earth we call home. Since 2018, we’ve been visited by this new winter bird, which hails from the same *Turdidae* family as the robin, bluebird,

varied thrush, and veery; birds “noted for their beautiful fluting songs.” David Allen Sibley’s *Field Guide to Birds of Western North America* describes the Townsend’s solitaire: weight 1.2 oz. Thrush. Uncommon in open forests or woodland edges. Nests in steep dirt banks. In winter, almost always found among juniper trees. Usually solitary. Feeds on insects, and berries (in winter). Cohort of dark-eyed juncos. White eye-ring. Call – clear, soft, whistled “heeh.”

We greet the returning Townsend’s solitaire with the same affection and gladness we feel when our grown sons come home to visit. They fledged many years earlier and established families of their own. The Townsends stay around all winter.

For decades, the apple tree didn’t host him. Why now? We imitate his call, and he responds with a flit of his tail and a brief flight over our heads. Is he as glad to see us as we are him? Are we reading too much into his response?

What do Rocky Mountain junipers have in common with *this* bird species?

The best thing we ever planted were Rocky Mountain juniper trees. The worst thing we ever planted were Rocky Mountain juniper trees. The visual result has been pleasing. We planted them among the pine, tamarack, poplars, hawthorns, and the magnificent crabapple tree, creating a living fence to delineate the boundary of the pristine from the proliferation of houses to the north.

We’ve discovered “there’s much more going on in our yard that would



Wintering Townsend’s solitaire on Half Moon Prairie. Photo by Tina Wynecoop.



Townsend's solitaire. Photo by Don Delaney.

not be going on if we didn't have one or more juniper trees gracing our piece of planet Earth," to paraphrase author and naturalist Douglas Tallamy's observations.

Junipers are not common on our prairie, although they are indigenous to the region, as their name implies. There are approximately 60 juniper species worldwide. They grow in many different shapes, sizes and even colors. They are easy to grow and have minimal requirements for water and rich soil. Our female junipers are bearing abundant fruits now. It takes three years for the fruit to ripen. The male tree can pollinate a female tree 100 miles distant; our trees reside near each other.

The First People utilized the juniper tree's gifts for snowshoe frames, spoons, bows, tea, fuel, implements, repellents and medicines. Burning

the boughs created a smudge that repelled mosquitoes and deer flies. Even their horses knew to hang around the smoke when the juniper boughs were lit to keep away the biting insects. The cones/berries were used to make a brown dye.

Kate Lebo devotes a chapter to the juniper in her 2021 *Book of Difficult Fruit: Arguments for the Tart, Tender and Unruly (With Recipes)*. She wrote, "the berries are a suitable substitute for black pepper, a flavor that complements cured meat, pickled fish, sauerkraut, game and other savory dishes."

She includes a recipe for juniper jelly.

On our walks we've tasted the juniper's berries, which have taken two to three years to ripen – they aren't really berries but edible cones. A low-growing common juniper shrub in our neighbor's yard has berries with nice flavor, and its boughs cover the ground, providing shelter and food for the quail families. The upright junipers we planted produce berries that taste like the pitch oozing from pine trees. A little off-putting, except to the solitaire.

We do have regrets about planting junipers; they do not deserve total paeans of praise because, in winter, the trees lose not their needles but their color and look so drab that they appear to be dying. On damp cold days, they smell like cat pee. And one more thing before I acknowledge the bright side of

their presence and why we appreciate them: The Rocky Mountain juniper carries a spore called cedar-apple rust. One spring, the junipers were covered with gelatinous brown blobs hanging like fingers from every branch. Once we learned what was attacking the trees, we found out the spores released from the host plant can attack apple trees. "Have we endangered our crabapple tree by introducing junipers?" We worry.

The Townsend's solitaire began wintering here after we planted the juniper trees. Otherwise, we may never have had this wonderful interaction with the bird. The trees' fruit sustains him. It has been recorded that this species eats 44,000 to 82,000 berries over the winter. He perches above his "territory," guarding his bounty from other birds. Does he fly out when we pass under his crabapple tree to greet us? Or to warn us that this is *his* landscape, and we are *not* to eat from his larder. We assure him we prefer huckleberries.

It's been wonderful living in one place for so many years. By walking about on it daily, we notice subtle changes in the natural landscape: a berry, a bird, a winter companion makes us want to soar and sing for "our own best book to read."

Note: A great online guide: *All About Birds*. A YouTube video that tells of the juniper's importance: Mike Denny and Daniel Biggs, *Secret Life of the Desert: The Deserts of the PNW*.

Stories, not statistics, touch my heart. Sharing my observations with NCM readers binds me to this wonderful upper Columbia region in ways I could not have foreseen. A children's author reminds us, "Even though words are small, they are great at making the inside of your head shine bright."

Don't Lose It

By Tina Tolliver Matney

They say getting older isn't for the faint of heart. I've been hearing that tidbit of experiential wisdom since I was just a gangly kid, living the best life in a tiny little town where my only worries seemed to be keeping my grades up and getting mediocre at playing my clarinet.

Okay, so those weren't my only worries, but I do remember the pressure to keep my grades up was a big deal in my head. Since my fifth and sixth grade teacher was also my music teacher, who took both her classroom and music room very, very seriously, well ... let's just say this particular teacher had a big impact on my life and the lives of many students.

It didn't take long as an adult to understand why Mom always chose to take an afternoon walk while we practiced away on our instruments, squeaking, squawking, and blaring down in the basement. My brother played the trumpet, while my sister played the saxophone, so among the three of us we made a lot of noise that probably wasn't very melodic.

But we were dedicated. She was that kind of a teacher, the kind who instilled the desire to do our best, no matter what. There were even a couple of years that I lugged home a

baritone so that I could be part of the hand-chosen group of kids she had asked to pick up a new instrument. Her intention was for us to participate in beginning band again to help mentor the younger students.

Walking across town with a baritone in one hand and my clarinet in the other while wearing a backpack weighed down with all my books - I might as well add I pretty much always felt like I was wearing shoes and pants that were two sizes too small - I'm surprised I don't remember it being uphill the whole way during a snowstorm. I see now that the stuff of my childhood really did shape me into the adult I grew into. And even now, as an adult with a desk full of Medicare packets taunting me from the to-do pile, I often remember the hard work I put into simply being a well-behaved, happy, and healthy kid.

Of course, things are different now. The work I put into being a well-rounded adult is sometimes exhausting. I'm probably not the only person in my "age group" that battles daily those aches and pains that sometimes threaten to sideline me.

The term "use it or lose it" applies just as much to my eyes and ears these days as my upper body strength. I've

never had stellar eyesight. A few weeks ago, when I was checking morning emails and partaking of a particularly delicious mug of coffee - it's always particularly delicious when I'm sipping it in a warm cozy chair and watching the snow come down - I noticed that some of that snow I was watching was still coming down when I looked at the cat who was curled up on my lap. My lap is her favorite place these days, when the weather outside is frightful. In her cat mind, anything less than sunshine and 65 degrees is apparently frightful. Anyway, I looked up again then looked down, and there they were. A bunch of "floaters."

And by "bunch" I mean I felt like a human snow globe that had been turned upside down, then plopped down on a table; a pattern that repeated itself every time I looked outside then tried to focus on something inside.

I sighed that sigh and went about my business of tidying up my space, and memorizing my sweet little cat's face, knowing I would be blind by lunch time. But I didn't go blind. Instead, I made an appointment, and my eye doctor assured me all was well, but to pay attention and document if it happened again.

So far it hasn't. His little hint that perhaps I had consumed a little too much coffee on an empty stomach that fateful moment when images of Helen Keller kept popping into my head was taken to heart. I've also taken to heart how much I truly have to work to stay healthy and upright. I see and often feel how easy it would be to just stop caring about being as mobile as I can be. But I do care, and I hope to goodness I never stop caring. I am forever grateful for a childhood



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that cemented in my soul this love for being outside and “moving.”

This season is generally not the mild, snowless, muddy, and foggy mess we have endured since our beautiful fall gave way to the rain we needed so badly. I had high hopes for days when the snow would keep me indoors with my watercolors and my keyboard. I imagined some biking through the French countryside on my indoor bike to stay active and in some semblance of shape.

I still want days filled with mugs of tea and the creativity I am finally feeling again. Who knows, we’ve only just begun the true winter season; maybe we will experience a real winter before spring arrives. But wintertime already feels short as the days gradually begin to bring us more, much needed light. It is that light that pulls me outside when my art table begs me to create or the to-do pile on my desk taunts me.

“Use it or lose it” means more to me now than just keeping my muscles as strong as an old woman can. It also pertains to the light outside and the light inside my life. I intend to use every bit of this life that I have been blessed with. I’m not a relatively carefree 12-year-old anymore, walking home with study books and musical instruments. I’m a nearly 65-year-old woman who, some days, feels the weight of a life that hasn’t always been easy while I walk the road toward home.

We can’t always choose what we have to carry. But we can sometimes choose when to set it down. This is my hope, my intention for this New Year. To set it all down, the things that have made my walk seem so long and hard. To use all of the good that is still in my heart and make sure that is the

only thing I carry for the rest of this great big life.

No, getting old isn’t for the faint of heart. But I have every intention of getting there and enjoying every bumpy road along the way. Happy New Year to you and yours.

Tina is a mother, grandmother, artist, rescuer of owls, eagles, hawks and other wild creatures, children’s book illustrator, gardener and hobby farmer who makes her home on the Kettle River. Check out the Kettle River Raptor Center on Facebook.

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Signs of Life

Article & Photo by D.L. Kreft

We are heading into the dead of winter, and the post-Christmas glow is beginning to fade. For some, winter is just the next season to be outdoors, and snow is the equivalent of summer sand on the beach. For others, the prolonged darkness just makes the winter chores all the more difficult, as if it weren't hard enough to push snow, haul wood, break ice, and feed animals.

The winter solstice has passed, and I can perceive the slightest shift to the north in the rising sun. The evening darkness comes a minute or two later each day, but never as much as I hoped. The world is muffled in grey clouds and a blanket of snow. I do what I must, waiting for signs of life.

I do wonder about the signs of life

we see, even in winter's grip. It is still too early for the plants to awaken from winter dormancy. But the animals do tell me something. This is the time of year when bald eagles pair up for the breeding season. They return to their nest sites and make repairs. Working together, they add new sticks to their massive nests. Wedged into the branches of large cottonwoods, pines and firs, these platforms can be six feet deep and 10 feet across. The pair will fend off interlopers who might try to take over their prime location. You may even see them dancing in the sky: wheeling together in ever-tightening circles; eventually spiraling down in a free fall with talons clasped together; separating at the last moment; and flying to a nearby tree, where the bond

is consummated, and new life begins.

Great horned owls are also nesting at this time of year. Their soft hooting can be heard in dark evenings, calling to one another, inviting mates, and declaring territories. It's hard to imagine how the hatchlings survive the winter cold, but the parents are well prepared to cover them in downy feathers next to their warm bodies, feeding them squirrels, mice and voles. Signs of life in the dead of winter.

On a walk a few winters ago, I noticed several Eurasian collared doves in a stand of aspen trees. These birds are often found year-round in the lower elevations near towns and farmsteads. Though not native to North America, these doves have shown a remarkable adaptability to our climates and habi-

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A Fresh Air Perspective

tats. Eurasian collared doves are native to the Middle East. They were accidentally introduced into the Bahamas in 1974, probably escapees from cages where they were kept as household pets. They quickly found their way to the mainland of Florida and, since the 1980s, have spread westward across the entire continent. They show remarkable resilience and provide proof of life, even in the coldest winters. In contrast to the harsh life of killing to survive - like owls, hawks, and eagles - these mild-mannered doves simply forage on seeds they can find at backyard feeders, opened hay bales, and spilled grain.

As I approached the bare aspen trees, most of the doves took flight to a nearby powerline farther away and higher up from me. But one remained on its branch, staring intently at me. Its appearance was demure with a sense of curiosity. The pinkish tan of its feathers ranged from a light, almost white, to a dark meld of browns. Black wingtips lay folded and tucked along its flanks, curved and pointed at their ends. A small, soft white patch adorned its throat, and a single, neat, black collar graced the back of its neck. The bare white trunks of the aspen grove stood in stark contrast to the warmth of this living creature,



a sign of life.

The forests and fields hold other signs of life, of course. Gatherings of white-tailed deer are seen under the moonlight. Small groups of mule deer creep down from the hills to join in the foraging. Bold bands of elk move silently from the densest cover to open fields and back again, providing an exciting change of pace to the usual happenings. On occasion, a lone moose or mother and calf will wander into sight and everything stops as we see which way they are going. Noisy

chickadees and clownish nuthatches chatter and squabble around backyard feeders. One does not have to look far to see vast flocks of wild turkeys flowing over the hillsides, scratching and pecking, eking out a living in the bleak winter.

We are reminded that life is all around us. The signs are everywhere.

Now that he is retired, Dave is enjoying life as a nature photographer, writer, and administrator of the Northeast Washington Birders Group, @NEWAbirders, on Facebook.

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Where Are Today's Old-Timers?

By Bob Gregson

“Old-timer” as a descriptor has not been heard in many years. At least by me. Now, grey hair denotes a “senior citizen,” not, heaven forbid, an elderly person, an oldster, or an old-timer. So how about this for a brand-new, 21st century descriptive phrase: a “youth-challenged” person? Let’s talk about such descriptors.

My one and only blood-related uncle, only 15 years older than me, but who always seemed many decades older and totally world-wise, often referred to the wisdom of some imaginary senior citizens when making a point to educate me as a youngster in the ways of the world. The reference was never to any particular senior citizen, just someone

who would, without a doubt, reinforce my uncle’s own highly biased views on some specific subject ... an “old-timer,” in his vernacular.

I never knew him to call someone by name as a reference. It was always much more generic, like “Old-timers know that all this environmental protection crap is nonsense. The forest always wins.” It should be noted that he was a relatively congenial, generous guy to people he knew, but a curmudgeon or worse to anyone anywhere of any social/political/academic status he didn’t actually know, or to any government policy whatsoever. Hence perhaps his need to add some made-up societal weight to his pronouncements.

As a senior toddler, I generally as-

sumed his reference to any “old-timer” was just more historical railroad talk, as when he and my grandpas met during holiday family get-togethers. They were all Great Northern railroad men who incessantly talked about past people and events on the railroad, usually including long discussions about who was or wasn’t at fault in regional train-wrecks or disruptions within the Great Northern railroad fraternity.

After I read about the Greeks and Romans in fourth or fifth grade, his references seemed (to my newly acquired ancient history ear) to refer to those ancients. Or at least to Mark Twain or Abraham Lincoln, who also were ancient in the minds of most 10-year-olds.



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A couple of years later, after more schooling and reading lots of youth-oriented biographies of famous Americans (the library had a large collection of orange-cover biographies I loved to read), my uncle's line of historical thinking fell further out of favor because he didn't name names. Did Mark Twain say something on that subject? Or Daniel Boone? Or Teddy Roosevelt? Nope, never did their names and viewpoints come up as a source of wisdom aimed at educating me.

Nor did any of the "old-timer advice" ever seem to come from or relate to women. Ever!

By high school, my ultimate sense of who my uncle was quoting conjured up the vision of an old, recluse guy with a long white beard, living in a shack in the woods near Spokane, who spoke to my uncle from time to time. They would mutually share their views of past and current events, including all manner of railroad news.

Much later, in the Army, the "old-timer" sort of wording was often applied to some seemingly ancient sergeant and his wisdom. Those ancient sergeants were in fact usually not more than 40 years old, but looked and acted older.

This all suggests that the description "old-timer" can mean just about anything to anyone. Quoting from such a nebulous person, or group of persons, is a sneaky way to add gravitas to whatever opinion one wants to share with someone else. "Yep, the old-timers always said [fill in the blanks], like I just told you."

So, the descriptor "old-timer" doesn't automatically come along at age 55, or 65, or any age whatsoever. He or they – it was always a male or group of males – was a mystical source of knowledge in the eyes of the person who wanted to convey a

special point of wisdom to his more youthful listener.

Ever since I passed into and through the typical middle age zone, I've been waiting to throw my weight around in the wisdom arena. Alas, no one has openly referred to me as "a wise old-timer" or quoted statements of mine, nor have I been sought out to share wise sayings and opinions about anything at all.

Then the light dawned.

In this current world of ours, most everyone from age three and above knows that Siri, or Shari, or Suzi, or whatever that artificial intelligence voice coming from a set of speakers at home is named, has all the answers! No need in this day and age to quote some anonymous old fogey to back up one's opinion. But sadly, doesn't that whole new, computer-generated approach deny some cultural older ways of doing things? Hmmmm.

After a great deal of focused thought during the last five minutes or so, I have come up with an approach that may allow any youth-challenged guy to reclaim the fabled masculine "old-timer" role in modern society: He can move into a shack in the woods, let his beard grow, conduct research on his laptop into old trainwreck stories and conspiracy theories of 100 years ago, and wait for someone like my uncle to discover him.

Their subsequent discussions could blossom into years of curmudgeonly podcasts to initiate unwary young men into the upper echelons of the world-wise. The heck with Shari or Suzi or Siri!

Bob Gregson, a 1964 West Point graduate from Pasco who served two combat tours in Vietnam, left the corporate world to organically farm on Vashon Island. He now lives in Spokane, his "spiritual home," where his parents grew up.



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Unearthing Family History Through Saved Letters: Stories

By Tabitha Gregory

Early this year, I discovered a collection of letters, now filling four banker boxes, to my parents from relatives written between 1920 and 2010. The letters create a chronicle of my family's 20th century history. In the North Columbia Monthly's October and November issues, I wrote about the discovery and preservation of the material. In this issue, I share highlights of the content.

December 14, 1958: Joy Clark, a slight 18-year-old, sat on her bed penning a letter to her beau, Ralph Gregory Jr. In perfect, right-slanting cursive, Joy wrote, "I still can't decide how to tell mother and daddy that I'm getting a ring for Christmas. I think maybe I'll just ask them what they would say if I did get one, or I may tell them I think that's what you might give me. I may tell Dolores and let her break the news. I don't know. Mother is dipping the candy now, so I think I'll go help her. I can eat some too. Even if it isn't good for my complexion!"

The next day, 50 miles northwest, in his dorm room at Oklahoma's Panhandle A&M, Ralph (or "Greg" as he liked to sign his letters) wrote, "Speaking of Friday, like woof, I wish it was done, went, and already come and got here already. Because I'll be a free bird for three beautiful, gorgeous, frantic and crazy weeks in which time I may get engaged to ... you."

This starry-eyed pair writing love letters were my parents, people who I would meet a decade later. Picturing them now, as I read their courtship letters, I'm in awe of their youth, vulnerability, naivete. At times, I roll my eyes, or my heart breaks, or a light bulb flashes on. Their words are so

it only took about an hour to get it done. They really aren't invitations, just little postcards. We sure invited a bunch. ... I'm scared it will turn into a drunken brawl because of some of those we invited. Anyway, I hope you can come."

Ralph, finishing up his finals, wrote back that for civics class, he would participate in a group discussion about the merits of legalized alcohol in Oklahoma. "Hmmm," he quipped to close his letter.

I Googled "legalized alcohol Oklahoma" and found that this was a hot political topic in 1958. The state's prohibition law was still in force, and the next year the voters repealed it. Both Mom and Dad were staunch teetotalers by the time I knew them.

The letters stopped for two weeks while the lovebirds enjoyed Christmas celebrations, togetherness, and got engaged. Then, right after the new year, they separated again – Joy to complete her senior year of high school and Ralph to complete his spring semester at A&M.

On January 4, 1959, Joy wrote, "I love you very much, and my ring seems to be brighter than ever before. Could be the growing love."

Then, on January 5, 1959, she reminisced, "My oh my, it seems so pleasant to think back over the wonderful times we've had these past two weeks. Ralph, I adore all your relatives. ... I'm so glad



Ralph and Joy Gregory, August 1959, First Baptist Church, Perryton, Texas

like the parents I came to know, yet also not all.

December 16, 1958: Tuesday afternoon, a school day, Joy wrote, "This morning...I went to Stacy's to write the invitations for our dance. There were four [of us girls] writing them and so

you were here for our dance, and I was so proud to have everyone meet you. Thank you for being such a perfect escort and companion. I feel that I am lucky, and I love you very much.”

January 7, 1959: Ralph, turning to practical matters, wrote back, “*Bud [a friend] got him a trailer house, and they are sure a lot cheaper than I thought. Also, the depreciation is very small. I’m beginning to think maybe this would be better than renting a house. Well, I guess it depends on how much I make this summer. We could get a note and try to pay it off in two or three years—that would probably be about \$6,000. Any ideas? This all sounds good, but I don’t know if we should get in the hole so far or not. We might not ever get out. Wow! Marriage problems.”*

Fast forward five years to 1964. Ralph and Joy no longer wrote to each other because now they were married with two tow-headed toddlers and a baby, and Ralph was wrapping up an architecture degree at OSU. Instead, the letters came from their parents, sisters, and aunts. As the holiday season approached, Joy’s mother wrote, “*Hope this finds you all well. Tell the girls that there is a package on the way for Christmas. We plan to go to Dolores and John’s for Christmas. I hope you all enjoy Christmas, and a happy New Year.”*

The next year, on November 8, 1965, Ralph’s mother wrote from her farmhouse back in Elmwood to her son, whom she called “Junior,” in Albuquerque. “*Well, do you have any idea when you will be home for Christmas? Amelia [sister] thought they would be home from the 9th to the 23rd... Danny is going to do their chores while they are here, so they just have to come when he is available. ... Sure hope you both can be here at the same time.”*

A few days earlier on November 2, 1965, Joy’s mother had written, “*We are looking forward to Christmas.*

Sure hope you all find something [a job] you like in Fort Worth, if you are still planning to change jobs. Dolores thinks Fort Worth is a good place to live (please dismiss Alaska).”

As it turned out, my parents left for Alaska just a few months after my Mamaw asked them not to consider it, taking with them their three daughters (I was born a year later in Juneau), a hope for a big adventurous life, and seemingly not looking back to those

dry, flat plains, the cattle, stripper wells, and windmills, and their own families – sisters, brother, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and great-aunts.

Tabitha Gregory lives in Spokane. She formerly worked as an executive director for a non-profit museum in rural Alaska and is the author of the non-fiction book, Valdez Rises: One Town’s Struggle for Survival After the Great Alaska Earthquake.

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Black Country Communion V

Saying Glenn Hughes is one of the greatest voices on the planet is like saying Gordon Ramsay can cook. It's almost an understatement. At age 73, Hughes' voice becomes even funkier, more soulful, and still as unpredictably stratospheric as anything you could hope to hear on the new BCC album, simply titled *V*.

That's not to leave out the propulsive guitar firepower of Joe Bonamassa, the heavy drumming of Jason Bonham, or the brilliant keyboard textures from the savant Derek Sherinian. This is truly a band album, and Black Country Communion wastes zero nanoseconds getting right into things with the groove-bombast of "Enlighten."

This isn't just a supergroup for the sake of gimmickry. This band truly evolves with every release, and refines its groove and delivery, as with the perfectly funky "Stay Free." Bonham lays down the backbeat while Sherinian channels the best of '70s Stevie Wonder before the chorus explodes with some of the best sounds of the last 10 years.

As expected, there's no filler here. Bonamassa injects the heavy blues of "Restless" with a typically killer guitar solo before Bonham supercharges the Zeppelin-y "Love and Faith," and Sherinian gets his turn to shine on the slightly off-kilter "You're Not Alone," with super-saturated keys that ping



and pong in the stereo field. In a marketplace where it's impossible to keep up with all the releases, genres and emerging artists, Black Country Communion's *V* is just about the most perfect rock album you could ask for.

Phillip Glass Piano Portfolio

As an elder statesman of avant-garde music at age 87, Phillip Glass has had decades to not only explore unusual, angular themes, but also to endure harsh criticism of his sonic exploration.

While the new *Solo* revisits some of his more famous work (recorded

during the pandemic mostly in front of small intimate audiences), it also breaks down Glass's compositional process in a way, as much of his music began on one piano.

"Mad Rush" moves with an easy, rhythmic dynamic. Originally written for the Dalai Lama in 1979, the track feels almost improvisational at times. "Metamorphosis II" arpeggiates its way in and out of a kind of sameness that frequently plagues some of Glass's work, but there is a soulful meter drift here that gives the work a bit of extra energy and soul.

The album, overall, does feel a bit reflective and seems to respond to the uproar of 2020 as it mines Glass's

piano catalog. "Truman Sleeps," originally from the film *The Truman Show*, rounds out the album nicely with a stately motif that almost feels like a nod to Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" at times.

The great thing about this album is that it not only explores Glass's more popular piano compositions but does so in a way that feels like a response to the global pandemic and a world caught in a disheveled state. In this way, Glass reinterprets some of his long-standing work through the lens of societal upheaval, which is truly interesting.

Check out Michael Pickett's music, free at pickettmusic.com.



A Good Read

My Old Man and the Mountain, by Leif Whittaker

Reviewed by Terry Cunningham

In 1963, Jim Whittaker and his Sherpa, Gombu, reached the summit of Mount Everest at 28,000 feet. From that experience, he authored *Life on the Edge*, which has since inspired countless people to take to the mountains and the outdoors to explore and participate in adventures.

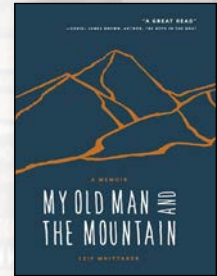
Jim's youngest son, Leif, didn't know where the story he had heard celebrated all of his life, through events sponsored by groups and equipment manufacturers, would lead. Many times he was asked if he wanted to climb, or if he was going to climb the world's tallest mountain. Ultimately, he did follow in his father's footsteps, literally in some cases. As he tells of his rigorous adventure in *My Old Man and the Mountain*, he also does an extraordinary job of keeping his father's accomplishment story alive and relevant.

As a first-time author, Leif aims to be true to his mission as he entertains with tales of growing up in a famous Pacific Northwest family. Leif's writing style reads like the journal

of a life-long adventurer who was born into a family of professional adventurers. Jim and his twin brother Lou started a guide service on Mount Rainier and then the outdoor outfitter co-op REI. They were also instrumental in the development of various kinds of outdoor gear that many of us own and love.

Leif lives in Bellingham, WA, where he is close to his family, friends, the Puget Sound and the Cascade Mountains. This memoir adventure is published by Mountaineers Books.

Terry says, "As a lifetime Earthling, I am constantly stunned and amazed by our world. I had many occupations before I became an arborist, which I retired from after 30 years of very satisfying work. I always had a passion for books and I'm excited to share that with you from my home of over 40 years, here in Stevens County."



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Starting Winter Without Snow: A Reflection on Aging and Staying Strong

By Rob Sumner

The content of the North Columbia Monthly is strictly for informational purposes only and should NOT be used as a substitute for professional medical diagnosis, advice, or treatment. Please, ALWAYS seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health provider with all questions that you have related to, or about, a medical condition.

I've been bummed. Every morning, I look out the window and see bare ground where there should be a thick, insulating layer of snow. Winter has always been a season I associate with quiet beauty – fields blanketed in white and the hush of snowfall covering everything in stillness. But this season, the snow just hasn't come like it usually does.

At first, I shrugged it off. It's just weather, right? But the more I thought about it, the more it started to bother me. Snow isn't just pretty, it's necessary. It protects the ground from freezing too deeply, keeps moisture locked in, and prepares the earth for spring. Without it, the soil is left exposed to harsh frost, brittle and cracked, unable to support growth when the warmth finally comes.

That got me thinking.

Isn't that a lot like how our bodies age?

Just like the earth relies on snow to protect it through winter, our bodies rely on strength, nutrition, mobility, and recovery to shield us as we get older. Without those layers of care, aging digs in like a deep frost, and our foundation – our muscles, our bones, our energy – start to weaken. At age 50, 60, or 70, the cracks appear; getting out of a chair feels harder, carrying groceries leaves you winded, or a stumble makes you worry instead of laugh.

It's not that necessarily that the years have been unkind; it's that perhaps we haven't added the protection we need.

When we're young, we generally don't think about it because our bodies are strong without effort. We run, lift, jump, and recover without a second thought. But after 50, the natural loss of muscle accelerates. Without attention, our strength slips away quietly. We don't notice it at first, but it shows up in small ways such as:

- Kneeling and then standing up becomes more of a struggle
- Lifting something heavy feels daunting
- Even everyday movements, like opening jars or climbing stairs, take more effort

I've seen this happen to friends, patients, and myself. It's a slow process – like frost settling deeper into the soil – and if we don't do something to stop it, we lose what once felt natural. Strength isn't just about lifting weights in the gym; it's about independence. It's about knowing you can get up off the floor if you fall. It's about carrying your own groceries, playing with your grandkids, and living life on your terms.

What Happens Without Proper Nourishment

It's not just about strength. Snow doesn't just insulate the earth, it holds moisture, preparing the ground for renewal in spring. Our bodies need the same kind of nourishment to thrive. Yet it's easy to let nutrition slide. We eat what's convenient instead of what's nourishing. We



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snack on sugary foods when we're tired, or grab processed meals because it's easier. I've been there, too.

The problem is, when we don't give our bodies the "moisture" they need – nutrient-dense foods, protein for our muscles, and water for our joints – everything starts to feel dry and brittle. Energy fades, bones weaken, and inflammation creeps in like frostbite.

It doesn't have to be complicated. Just like snow falling steadily over time, small, consistent changes like adding protein to a meal, drinking more water, or replacing sugary snacks with real food can make a big difference.

Mobility: The Quiet Protector

One thing I've noticed as I've gotten older is how easy it is to take mobility for granted. When we're young, we bend, twist, and stretch without even thinking about it. But as we age, stiffness sneaks up on us, and before we know it, we've stopped moving the way we used to.

It's like the snow covering an uneven field. Without it, every dip and ridge becomes a hazard. Mobility smooths out those edges for us, helping us move freely, confidently, and without pain. But when we stop stretching, stop bending, and stop challenging our bodies to move, we harden in place.

I've seen this happen to people who avoid exercise or think they're "too old" to stretch. Their hips tighten, their shoulders freeze, and their balance falters. Suddenly, everyday things like reaching for a cup in the cabinet, tying a shoe, or walking on uneven ground, become challenging.

I don't want to let my body stiffen up. I want to move through life as easily as I can for as long as I can.

The Rest We Often Forget

This lack of snow has also reminded me how important rest is. Snow allows the earth to rest and prepare for the seasons to come. We need that same kind of rest.

Yet, too often, we sacrifice sleep or ignore the stress we carry. I know I've done it, pushing through exhaustion, convincing myself I can catch up later. But the truth is, rest isn't a luxury, it's a necessity. Without it, we can't rebuild.

When we sleep well, there is opportunity for our muscles to recover, our energy to return, and our minds to reset. When we take a breath and manage stress, we give our bodies a chance to let go of tension.

The Consequences of a Bare Winter

I think about what happens when there's no snow; the

ground freezes harder, and the roots suffer. When spring finally comes, the earth isn't ready for growth – it's too brittle, too damaged by the cold. That's what can happen to us when we neglect our health as we age. Without strength, we lose the ability to move freely. Without nourishment, our bodies grow weaker. Without mobility, we become stiff and fragile. And without rest, we can't recover.

It's Never Too Late for a Fresh Layer of Snow

I've realized something important this winter. Just because the snow hasn't come naturally doesn't mean we can't protect the ground ourselves. And the same goes for our health.

It's never too late to start adding layers of strength, nutrition, movement, and recovery. It doesn't take giant steps. Like snow falling one flake at a time, small efforts add up. One stretch. One good meal. One night of better sleep. Then another.

We may not be able to stop the winter of aging, but we can prepare for it. We can insulate ourselves so that when life gets hard, our bodies stay strong, steady, and ready for renewal.

Rob Sumner is a doctor of physical therapy, strength specialist, and owner of Specialized Strength Fitness and Sumner Specialized Physical Therapy in Colville. He can be reached at 509-684-5621 or Rob@SumnerPT.com.

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A Year On The Farm

Buying Milk

By Michelle Lancaster

We sold our last cow this past spring and became milk consumers instead of producers. While I would much rather have fresh milk from my own cow, it is sadly not possible for us; yet I am thankful to live in an area rich with lots of milk options! With my experience as a farmer, here is my perspective on what I look for when buying milk.

Raw and clean: Raw milk and cleanliness go hand in hand, because you cannot have one without the other. Raw milk is the easiest to digest and is fully intact – no broken pro-

tein bonds, all the natural vitamins, etc. After years of experiencing the differences in digestion between raw and pasteurized, I will never return to drinking pasteurized milk. Raw milk has healed the gut of several people I know, myself included, and has won me as a permanent convert. I realize some consider raw milk a hot topic and I encourage you to do your own research. Do not let me or anyone tell you what is best for you.

Cleanliness is near impossible to detect at the store level, unless you buy milk and taste a problem. Thank-

fully, all Grade A dairies in the state are monitored and routinely tested for important cleanliness measures such as standard plate count and somatic cell count, which gauges udder health. What's even better is if you can visit the farm your milk comes from. We try to do that, both because we enjoy visiting farms and because we believe that quality milk starts with clean, healthy cows in clean facilities.

Glass: Currently, a few local producers offer Grade A milk in glass. Glass does not leach any chemicals

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into milk and is a reusable resource. We can wash and return our jar each week, which is really nice. Some farms sell in plastic, which is less than ideal, but at least for now plastic milk jugs are recyclable locally.

Cream: Clear containers allow you to see the cream line in milk. In my family, cream is the single most valuable portion of milk. The fat component is the standard from which all milks are judged. A Holstein milk of 3.0 percent butterfat is literally worth less in the commercial market than a Jersey milk of 5.0 percent butterfat. Protein is the second most coveted component, but you cannot visually see protein in milk other than that, when the cream line rises, the skim milk underneath the cream should still be a creamy color, not blue or clear-tinged.

When I worked at a local grocery store, the question I was most asked was about the difference in price of raw milk options. Why would one half gallon cost five dollars and another product in a gallon jug cost six? The answer is primarily in components (fat and protein) and management. The producer of the more expensive milk focused more on pasturing their animals, feeding fodder in winter, and working toward a good vitamin content. The cheaper milk was produced in more of an indoor confinement-type operation. Some people are willing and/or able to pay more to support and consume milk produced with more natural farming methods.

Pastured: It's a well-studied fact that cows are ruminants intended to be fed forages like grass and alfalfa, and that high-grain diets produce fewer desirable fats and lower vitamin levels in milk. We are not opposed to grain supplement, as needed, for the health of the cow, but we look for cows fed primarily forages. Even better is pasture. Pasture

is the healthiest and most sustainable feed possible for dairy cattle. We try to support farms that pasture their cows in season.

Which of the following are on labels? Any raw milk sold in Washington state must be labeled as such. Cleanliness is not listed, but Grade A standards can be looked up. Farms can lose their Grade A status if they do not maintain cleanliness standards. Glass/plastic/waxed cardboard is obvious when you buy. Butterfat content may or may not be listed. Whole milk is considered any milk above 3.25% butterfat content, and whole milk status should be listed on the label. A herd of Jersey or Guernsey cows may give almost twice the fat. That is not likely to be listed. You have to see the cream-line or know the herd the milk is coming from to get any sense of whether the whole milk might be above minimum standards. "Creamline milk" may be noted on a jar, but that is not indicating butterfat content; instead, it indicates the milk has not been homogenized.

Homogenization physically bursts the fat globules, so they do not rise to the top of milk. Homogenization is only an appearance issue, and it was once thought that people should not have to go through the minor effort of shaking a jar and said jar might look prettier on a shelf if the cream had not risen to the top.

Lastly, pasture status may be listed on a label, though it is not required. Organic farms are required to pasture their cows a certain number of days per year, and organic labels often do note pasture status. Just because it is not on the label does not necessarily mean a herd is or is not on pasture in summer months; you would have to ask the farmer.

The above list does not mean that I am able to find milk that meets all the criteria, but these are some of the

things I look for, and think about, when purchasing dairy products. I would encourage any dairy enthusiasts to try different local milks and ask lots of questions. There are some fun products being produced locally and I am all for supporting local farms.

Michelle Lancaster homesteads with her family on Old Dominion Mountain in Colville. She writes at Spiritedrose.wordpress.com.



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Where Beauty Is

Article and Photo by Jean Handwerk

I recently learned that a common adage is not correct. Beauty is not in the *eye* of the beholder. It's actually in the *heart* of the beholder. Here's the proof:

A friend was checking something on my roof. I would have done it myself, but I am recovering from a broken ankle and it's not flexible enough yet to risk climbing onto and up a roof. So out of the goodness of his heart, he was willing to check things for me. My roof, by the way, is metal with a four- or five-twelve pitch. Fortunately, it's a one-story home.

Just as he finished the task, it unexpectedly began to sprinkle. He immediately started down toward the ladder, but faster than I thought was wise. Then he stood up, which made even less sense, because his only roof contact then was on the soles of his shoes. Had he stayed down on his rear end, and used both shoes and hands and screw heads, he would have been much

safer. I learned later that when he saw his danger, he was preparing to "drop and roll" to lessen the damage a fall might incur. However, a split second later, he lost control and I heard him call out, "I'm slipping!" The next few seconds did not go well.

As his feet slid downward, they encountered the top of the ladder, pushing it away from the house. However, his feet and shins had become entangled with the ladder,

which proceeded to propel him in an arc from the roof's lower edge to the ground, about 12 feet away from the house. Midway through the arc, man and ladder separated, and I can still see my friend cartwheeling in the air, arms and legs spread wide as he



helplessly spiraled toward impact on the ground. Fortunately, the arc was large enough that he didn't land on the concrete sidewalk, but a few feet from it. Still, the ground was hard.

He lay there motionless for a few seconds, which seemed to last forever. I thought he was dead and had died helping me. Suddenly the roof check seemed so unimportant. Had we only known there was even a chance of rain....

I stroked his head and talked to him, but he didn't respond. Then finally, *finally*, he made a noise in his throat, and then his eyes opened but they weren't seeing anything. "Oh, no!?" I thought. "Brain damage!" But then he started talking and it was

obvious he had a concussion. He kept asking, "What happened? Did I have a seizure? What happened? What was I doing on the roof? What happened?" He said his left wrist was really hurting him, so I put a crude splint on it after I called 911. Thank God for that service.

One calm, competent, local woman arrived several minutes before the efficient and capable ambulance crew came. She started assessing him and I did what I could to make him as comfortable as possible. Two quilts on top helped warm him only minimally because his back was in direct contact with the cold ground, but at least they kept him dry, as the unpredictable sprinkling continued. An umbrella to shelter his face from the droplets also helped in the forever-time till I saw the ambulance's flashing lights as it came down the driveway. By that time, the initial mental confusion had eased and he was answering questions sensibly.

In just a few minutes, my suffering friend was on his way to the local hospital, then again on the road to Spokane for surgery. Miraculous-

ly, despite a 12-foot fall, he not only survived but needed only one surgical repair. Though both wrists were broken, only the dominant-hand wrist needed a plate and screws. In all, he had 13 fractures: one cervical vertebrae, one thoracic vertebrae, six ribs, sternum, shoulder, both wrists, and pelvis. And incredibly, only one bruise on one hip. Fortunately, neither leg had been injured. He was up and walking the day after the fall when friends came to encourage him.

But now to the adage that beauty is actually in the *heart* of the beholder. Two weeks after the potentially fatal fall, I drove my friend to Spokane for a checkup. We talked on the way down, but it wasn't until he emerged from the doctor's office and came into the waiting room that the realization hit me about beauty. My friend's clothing fit him poorly. They were too big for his frame, but it was what he could manage to get on. His two broken wrists were in bulky, stiff wrist guards, extending halfway up his forearms. Buttons, zippers, and belts had become challenging. His footwear was slip-on house slippers, and a too-large, borrowed jacket rested on his shoulders. He could not wear the jacket zipped up to protect from the chilly air – again because it was too painful for his shoulder to get his arms into the sleeves. His hair – longer than usual for him – was mostly uncombed and needed to be

washed, and he had a scruffy beard because shaving was too painful. He walked strangely, keeping both elbows bent and his forearms close to his chest. In short, he looked like he was down and out.

But then, as he walked slowly and carefully toward me, he smiled, and to me, he looked absolutely wonderful! I'd known him for years, but at that moment, he was truly beautiful to me, and I was so happy to see him again. His appearance meant nothing; I knew his story, and his smile lit up his face *and my heart!* I would have hugged him right then and there, but I refrained, lest any pressure ramp up his pain.

That smile meant he was going to make it through this physical challenge with a good attitude. He would find things to smile about. That attitude would not only help him endure the coming months of recovery, but it also would help those who care about him. It would ease our concern about him. Who cares what he looked like? What matters is the *person*, not the fit of the clothes, or the length or cleanliness of the hair. Amazing souls can be found in the most discouraging circumstances, and he was walking proof of that.

There's another well-known adage that fits this situation well, "Don't judge a book by its cover." When we see someone – anyone – we have no idea what that person has gone

through or is going through. We may only see the far less important externals, but each person consists primarily of internals, things like integrity, loyalty, thoughtfulness, humor, courage, patience, persistence, hope, and love. Everyone has a story to tell, whether or not we ever hear it. Some have withstood terrible adversity. Everyone's got wisdom to share and life experiences that have shaped them into the person they are at present, which, when shared, can help others navigate their own lives.

With these realizations, I vowed to never lose an opportunity to look past the externals to really see the beauty in each person, and to find some precious gems hidden under those meaningless externals. And remembering to smile at them, too. We've each got our own back-story!

A transplant from the East Coast, Jean writes, copyedits and gardens from her homestead in NE Washington.

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In the Snow, Warm Memories

By Karen Giebel

“The hard soil and four months of snow make the inhabitants of the northern temperate zone wiser and abler than his fellow who enjoys the fixed smile of the tropics.”

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Here we go again. Another winter is upon us, and it will neither be longer or shorter than any past winter; they are all three months long even if many seem to last for half the year. I've always been a resident of “the northern temperate zone,” and this is in fact my 71st winter, a fact I find difficult to believe. Over the years, I have seen wild, mild, and everything in between.

Growing up in rural Chautauqua County in western New York, on the shores of that great Lake Erie, I was smack dab in the middle of that

infamous “snow belt” that makes the nightly news every year. We had snow like you wouldn't believe. Six to eight feet of snow or more would fall every winter, sometimes several feet in one week, before Lake Erie finally froze over. It's called lake effect snow; as storm systems rolled in over the non-frozen lake, they sucked up all that moisture, turning it into snow, and dumping it in massive quantities over the landscape and homes in Chautauqua County.

Even though we were used to snow, the first snowflakes still elicited

excitement among schoolchildren. We would be poring over our books until one small voice said, “it's snowing!” Rising as one, we raced to the windows as our benevolent teachers smiled; they knew there was no stopping us.

Snow day absences from school were rare, as our towns and villages were well prepared. Snowplows would start in the wee hours of the morning while our heads were still nestled in bed, and lucky students could catch a 7 a.m. bus rolling down a perfectly plowed road.

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Reflections on Life's Journey

I was not one of them. I didn't live far enough from school to be eligible for the bus. So, I had a half mile walk up the road, then down a hill to reach the school door. And Berry Road did not have sidewalks. Instead, there was a well-worn path trodden down by the countless little feet of small children encased in bread bags and stuffed into rubber boots. That path was not shoveled. The first little ones out the door broke a path for the rest to follow. Our fathers were already at work when we left for school, and no family owned a second car.

Clothed in woolen snow pants, long wool coats, knit hats and mittens attached with clips to our coats, and sporting faces swathed in hand-knit scarves, off we set, arriving in our classrooms clouded in the not-so-pleasant aroma of steaming wet wool. I don't remember anyone complaining, though. It was just the way it was in the 1950s.

You would think we had enough of the snow, walking to school and back five days a week, but no. After breakfast and Looney Tunes cartoons on Saturday morning, we repeated bundling up with the woolen outerwear and raced out the door, gathering friends, sleds and metal saucers as we broke a pathway through the snow for the hill behind our house. We kids named that slope Powder Puff Hill, in honor of the overly abundant powdery snow that decked our winter playground.

Up and down that hill we went, each time sledding faster and faster as the snow was packed down. We'd declare contests to see who could go the farthest and make it to the vineyard of concord grape vines in the distance. Our little sister was allowed

to go with us after mom admonished us "Do not let Sally go down that hill by herself." Sally, five years younger than I, was indeed little, but we, of course, put her belly down on that sled, gave her a push and yelled, "Wow, look at her go!"

We would head home for lunch when we heard the calls. Mrs. Swank, now still alive and well at age 94, would put two fingers in her mouth and whistle her kids home. My mom leaned out the door and loudly ran a clanging bell for her four urchins. After lunch, which often was hot tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches, we begged to go back out sledding even though our coats and mittens were still wet and our wrists and faces were chafed and reddened. We just could not get enough of that snowy fun.

My brother, who was two years younger than I (and is now deceased), did typical boy stuff, which means he did some really dumb things without stopping to think. One year, he and two friends took a sled out after dark and all three piled on it belly down with my brother on the bottom. Off they went down a different slope through the pine forest and smack into a tree.

One friend came running into our house, calling out, "Mrs. Castleberry, Mrs. Castleberry! Bill's dead. Bill's dead!" Of course, he wasn't, but my brother at that age was such an awful pest and tease (who can relate?) that I thought to myself, "Well, that's good." But mom and I hurried outside to see the other friend dragging that sled carrying my brother through the snow to the house, with my brother moaning as loudly as he could.

Dad was working the 4 to 12 shift

that winter, so there was no car at home. Mom called a neighbor who helped get Bill into his car and drove to the hospital, where he was found to have a broken collarbone. My brother outgrew being a pest but remained a lifelong tease. I miss him.

These snow memories and more define winter for me. I still like winter. Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing may have replaced sledding for me, but I still smile at those first snowflakes of the season. I don't break a path to school, but I still bundle up and trudge through the snow, breaking paths to the bird feeders, the chicken coop and the sheds to gather alfalfa for our wild friends.

Sometimes my arthritic hands and back suggest I visit "the fixed smile of the tropics for winter," but my memories and my heart tell me that I am still in the right place.

In this new year, I hope your troubles are few and you are abundantly blessed with happiness.

Merry Christmas from Back of the Beyond in Ferry County, Washington!

Karen Castleberry Giebel blogs about life and food at www.thejourneygirl.com up in the back of the beyond in Ferry County, Washington.



The Christmas Curmudgeon

Article and Photo by Joe Barreca

I am writing this a couple of days before the Winter Solstice. By the time you read it, Christmas will be over and New Year's too. Hopefully we have survived both events. I had a prioritized list for Christmas:

Write newsletter; get cards; print labels; buy stamps; send cards and newsletters; figure out gifts; get tree. Of course, there are many other line items in there, like put up lights, actually buy gifts, wrap and send gifts, etc., but you get the idea. Christmas is a self-imposed gauntlet of to-dos to add on top of getting in firewood, preparing to plow snow, getting snow tires on ... how did we get to be this way?

There is not much to go on in the archaeological record. Sure, everyone had observatories that pinpointed the exact shortest day of the year. Stonehenge, the pyramids, the Incas at Machu Picchu ... the list goes on and on. What we are short on in archaeology are stories about what went on after people knew the days were getting longer.

Anthropology to the rescue. Dong Zhi, the "arrival of winter," is celebrated in China by eating rice balls. The Hopi Indians celebrate Soyal with purifications and kachinas, protective spirits from the mountains. Scandinavians lit fires

to ward off evil spirits. During the Roman festival of Saturnalia, slaves were treated as equals (a little like Boxing Day in Britain where masters and servants trade places). Inti Raymi, an ancient Peruvian festi-

gering seizures in individuals sensitive to light flicker, particularly those with epilepsy. How long until we have our own drone displays playing Santa and Reindeer in the air with sound and music?



The seasonal section at Walmart

val, included feasts and sacrifices of animals and some sacrifices that, well, let's say they went way beyond Santa Claus's naughty and nice list. The Persian festival Yalda, or Shab-e Yalda, marks the victory of light over dark. Some Persians stay awake all night long to welcome the morning sun. (That sounds more like New Year's.) At any rate, our Christmas festivities are not that new or unusual, but they do tend to go over the top, in my opinion, especially on decorations.

Every year, the lighting competition gets more intense. LED lights are now ancient history. Software controlling them is where the action is. Lights now flash in many ways, at many speeds, possibly trig-

gering seizures in individuals sensitive to light flicker.

Wow, the music. You can't get away from the music. Not that it's bad, it's too good. Christmas music is persistent. It stays in your head. Old songs like "Jingle Bells" don't bother me much but others seem like brainwashing: "The most wonderful time of the year;" "He knows when you've been sleeping;" "Up on the rooftop." Often, it just comes down to gifts.

I used to make gifts for my kids. Now that they are middle-aged, not so much, but usually food and drink that have very little environmental impact.

In our local Walmart supercenter, whole sections are devoted to seasonal gifts and decorations. When looking at those displays, I have to ask myself, "What is this stuff? Where did it come from? Where will it end up?" From an environmental point of view, the answers are not encouraging. A lot of gifts use tag board packaging that is not recyclable. A lot of plastic inside is destined for the dump. A lot of colorful ink and wrapping is probably toxic. Many items are shipped on

freighters running on bunker fuel, then loaded on trains and diesel trucks. Everything with a barcode that measures what sells best and tracks who bought it. Does any of this stuff actually ward off evil spirits? That might be useful.

So, count me in as a Christmas curmudgeon. Interestingly, when you look that word up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, you get “a bad-tempered person, especially an old one.” Sure, they had to throw in the old person reference. Maybe it would be better to be considered a snob. At least that has a touch of class and wealth. Oh, wait a minute. The wealth part is not going to work out. I don’t have a big Social Security check or a car less than

20 years old. But if you compare my resources to the income of the people who probably made these things, it’s giant.

A snob would snub their nose at your run-of-the-mill Christmas gifts. But I can’t afford to do that either. The truth is, I buy lights and new gizmos. I send gifts made in China packed in cardboard made from newly harvested trees. I have a freshly cut tree that will end up as air pollution. I relish our display of cards from friends near and far and enjoy reading annual newsletters. I probably eat too many things that are not going to be part of a weight-watchers diet. I’m a Christmas hypocrite. I’ve been colonized by Christmas.

No reflective person examining their part in the whole Christmas parade can help feeling a little guilty for their part in it. But that’s where religion comes in. I was raised Catholic. I spent the first 20 years of life feeling guilty for one thing or another and going to confession to get over it. I’m totally prepared for Christmas guilt. Also, I have the Christmas newsletter routine down to a science. Careful journal entries, documenting pictures, consistent themes. Christmas newsletters are just practice for the new year and filing taxes.

Joe Barreca makes maps, grows grapes, makes wine and posts blogs on BarrecaVineyards.com. Vineyard apprentices are welcome!

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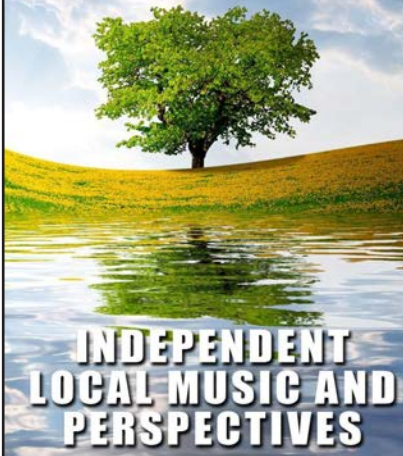
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Far from Silent Night

By Bob McGregor

=As I was browsing the clearance items at Super One, three weeks before Christmas, I came across what was, according to the tag, a dancing, singing reindeer. This item did neither of the two! Guessing he probably just lacked batteries, I decided to take a chance. For two bucks, I thought, what did I have to lose?

When I popped open the battery case at home, I found one of the reasons why he had been on clearance. He did have batteries, three dead Chinese batteries. With new batteries inserted, and by pushing the button to the right, the reindeer became a dancing, singing fool. The music was too loud and the dancing quite repetitive, but the variety of Christmas songs was quite amazing.

I wondered: What was the purpose of the second button, located right next to the dancing/music button? I pushed it, silently waited, and absolutely nothing happened.

When my five-year-old granddaughter arrived, she found the reindeer to be very enchanting, and shortly discovered that the extra button was to make the reindeer (or “Mr. Stick” as grandma called him) repeat whatever she said.

Since he was born in China, his English was not very clear. But with a little practice and clear enunciation, he got better. Our granddaughter decided it would be fun to take him for the short ride with grandma to Kettle Falls for her after-school activity. Upon their return, grandma said, “We’ve got to get rid of Mr. Stick. He will drive us crazy!” So, I suggested to our granddaughter that she

take Mr. Stick home. She was delighted!

I must admit, I did feel a little guilty because I truly do like my son-in-law and daughter, but desperate times demand desperate measures. Besides, with three dogs, a cat, and a nine-year-old brother, how long could Mr. Stick last? If he still survived, they could always put him in the chicken coop; chickens will attack anything smaller than them that moves. Mr. Stick’s dance moves were enough to make anything want to attack. I figured that was the last of Mr. Stick.

After he was gone, I began to reconsider. How many Christmas songs could he sing? Was he really that bad? Maybe I had given up on him too soon? Should I try to get him back? Then I remembered, there was still a singing, dancing Santa Claus in the same clearance bin. Maybe Santa would be slightly less obnoxious.

Well, Santa’s Chinese batteries were also dead, and he failed to dance when the batteries were replaced, but he still sang and tried to repeat whatever was said to him. I’ve only managed to listen to 13 Christmas songs before I reached my Christmas song saturation point, so I have yet to determine the full length of his musical repertoire. If you find a singing, dancing reindeer or Santa in a clearance bin, you may want to leave it there.

Bob McGregor, originally from North Dakota, taught science and math in North Dakota, Alaska, and for the Community Colleges of Spokane in Colville. He is happily retired.



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Letting Go

By Brenda St. John

As I was playing “chuck it” with my sweet fur baby today, we once again lost one of the two balls. I always bring two because I can’t keep track of three, and there’s no game with only one. My dog will chase one ball while carrying the other, but if we lose one in the brush, the game is over because she won’t release so I can throw the ball again. She doesn’t understand that if she would just let go, the fun could continue longer.

(Note to my neighboring property owner: If you ever walk the wetland and find any orange rubber balls, please throw them over to my side of the fence.)

Letting go can be a hard concept for anyone to grasp, not just a two-year old Aussie. There’s security in holding onto things and comfort in maintaining a habit. But at some level, we all know there are even more benefits to letting go, to releasing.

There are so many things I hold onto. My massage therapist always chuckles at the same visible knot on my back where I hold onto tension, and I am so grateful to her for helping me let go of it. I try hard to let go of expectations of myself and others and to live more like my friend John used to say, “don’t push the river.” I let go of my thoughts, I let go of negative emotions, and I have greatly improved in letting go of anxiety, but I still have room for growth.

One area where I am currently struggling is with *Aparigraha*, which is one of the *yamas* (the ethical guidelines of yoga). *Aparigraha* has to do with attachment to possessions. I am actively wrestling with this *yama* as I restore my basement. My daylight basement flooded last September when a pipe burst, and almost everything in

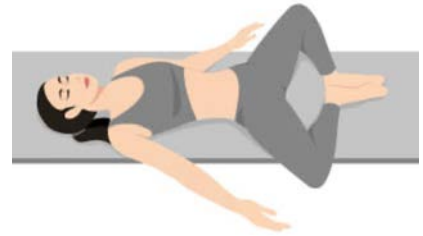
the basement had to come out so the contractors could dry and dehumidify the structure. All my possessions from that section of the house were put in a storage container.

Now that the restoration is complete, I have been unloading furniture and boxes, trying to make the five rooms more functional and efficient. This requires a lot of “letting go,” because my priorities and activities have changed over the 33 years that I have lived here. Everything has a memory, and I am a sentimental person, but when I think of the items as being reabsorbed by the universe, it makes it easier for me to let them go.

In the world of yoga asana, the epitome of “letting go” is *Savasana*, but there are others, too. Since I just wrote about *Savasana* a few months ago, I will use *Supta Baddha Konasana* as the pose this month. The English translation of the Sanskrit name is Reclining Bound Angle pose, or some would recognize it as Reclining Butterfly.

In this pose, the body is in a reclined position, face up, with the soles of the feet together and the knees falling outward, supported by props if needed. The pose releases the hips, where we commonly hold tension and emotions. With arms out to the sides and palms up, the pose opens the chest and the heart area. With the back fully supported, the body can surrender to gravity, which encourages relaxation. Focusing on the breath allows the practitioner to mentally let go of thoughts and be mindfully present in the moment.

To begin *Supta Baddha Konasana*, lie down with knees bent, feet on the floor. Gently open your knees, letting them fall. Bring the soles of the feet together, creating a diamond shape



with the legs. Open the arms slightly, letting them rest on the floor with the palms facing the ceiling. Consciously relax the muscles around the hips, allowing gravity to pull the knees down toward the floor gently. Do not force any part of the pose. It may be more comfortable to place props such as yoga blocks or rolled blankets under the knees or thighs.

Supta Baddha Konasana also enhances circulation, in addition to the benefits mentioned above. It is commonly mentioned as a favorite yoga pose because of its relaxation-inducing qualities. The pose is safe for most people, including pregnant women, but should be avoided by those who have hip or knee injuries.

One variation is to recline against an inclined bolster instead of lying flat on the floor. The incline is created by placing two blocks of unequal height a foot or so apart as a support for the bolster. Another variation is a modification of Legs Up the Wall pose, where the spine is flat on the floor, hips at the base of the wall, and legs up the wall in the diamond shape.

No matter which version of *Supta Baddha Konasana* is practiced, the yogi should stay in the pose for two to 10 minutes, practicing slow steady breathing the entire time and letting go of tension, stress, and worries.

Namaste.

Brenda St. John has taught yoga classes in Chewelah since 2010 and is also a Spokane Community College ACT 2 instructor.



Slow for Camels!

By Marianne Richards

Our rural lifestyle tends to be slower here in Stevens County. When driving, we tend to be alert for deer or turkeys ... and camels? In our neighborhood this summer and fall, we have been surprised and thrilled to see not only camels, but yaks, llamas, goats, sheep and one dog. If you ask their shepherds, Chris or Chloe, if the animals belong to them, their answer would be “no, we belong to them.”

I think that is the right answer when I watch this herd of 29 animals and how the humans and animals relate in this peaceful kingdom. Chris notes that he thinks the goats are easier to train than the dog!

Chris and Chloe joined us for a couple of our Slow Food gatherings this fall. As we all introduced ourselves and said what food we brought to share, Chris explained that they brought VERY slow food: camel meat! Delicious, by the way. Here is their story, shared over dinner.

Chris grew up on a farm in western Washington, where he gained experience and respect for all the farm animals. While attending college in Seattle, he became hospitalized and deathly ill. When told he would be on medication the rest of his life, he decided to seek an alternative to that future. He sought out the solace of animals, saying that “animals are the central foundation of my life.”

Chloe echoes a similar “call of the wild,” saying, “We honor and respect all animals.” Her background includes working as a butcher; she says she is always aware and respectful of their relationship. Their animals are well loved and tended to, and in return they provide food, naturally tanned leather for clothes and gear, as well as warm bedding made from felted wool. The goats provide a large part of their nutrition. “Mountain milk!” She exclaims with a smile. “So delicious!”

In addition to self-taught knowledge, the couple has attended and taught classes within the ancestral skills community. Over elderberry tea, they shared some of their knowledge for using native plants for both medicinal and

nutritional needs. So much to learn from them!

They have logged thousands of miles herding their animals over several years in Oregon, Washington and Idaho – even onto the Gifford Ferry! When on the move, the camels, yaks and llamas carry most of the gear, using packs the couple made. One human leads, one takes the rear, and the walk begins.

These two modern nomads do use cell phones to help with navigation and as a safety net. Equally important, they say, is the ability to stay in contact with family and friends. An experiment to do without a cell phone for one year confirmed that the cell phones stayed!

I asked about their impression of Stevens County, and there was no doubt that this has become a favorite place to return to. Through connections made in the community, some landowners will provide a place for Chris and Chloe’s tidy and compact camp, in exchange for rotational and sustainable grazing and weed control. Fertilizer included! By grazing a variety of animals, all eating different weeds, the process is very efficient. They erect portable fencing and stay with the herd, so that predators are not a problem for them.

This system works so well that the landowners often invite them back year after year, sometimes offering garden space as well. “The folks we’ve met here give us hope and optimism,” Chris shared.

Before Thanksgiving, I dropped by for one last visit of 2024, and I will always recall the magical feeling of the animals quietly gathering around me, allowing me to pet them and take in their earthy, intoxicating scent. I felt accepted, safe, and warm with the universal language of animals. Those of us who share a connection with animals are privileged to experience life between the tame and wild worlds. I believe we miss so much if spending too much time in the disconnected tame world.

While this couple may make their chosen lifestyle look simple and carefree, they have clearly gleaned important survival skills along the way. Being confident, tenacious, and stubborn to continue has worked in their favor. Once family members saw the remarkable recovery in Chris’ health, along with his contentment, the family became very supportive, which is a wonderful gift.

I’m reminded of the old childhood story of “Heidi,” which tells how an invalid child grew strong and healthy on goat’s milk in the mountains of Switzerland. Always some truth in those old stories. And they lived happily ever after....

Thank you for sharing your story, Chris, Chloe, and company. Good tidings and safe travels!

Marianne Richards says she is “embracing the senior years with energy and enthusiasm here in Rice, WA. Each day invites me to discover and explore. Onward...!”

Hello Skagway

By Becky Dubell

It is amazing that I've been here 20 days and I have already entered and immersed myself in Mom's way of life. My "normal" has changed once again. After I lost Jim and now, thinking back on the last few years, every time I come up to be with Mom, my "normal" gets all switched around. My days have run together. I realized tonight that Christmas is only five days away. My mantra has been kicked to the front of my brain, "It is what it is and it will become what I make it."

The highlight of my day is the view out of Mom's window. Whether it is raining, cloudy, snowing, windy,

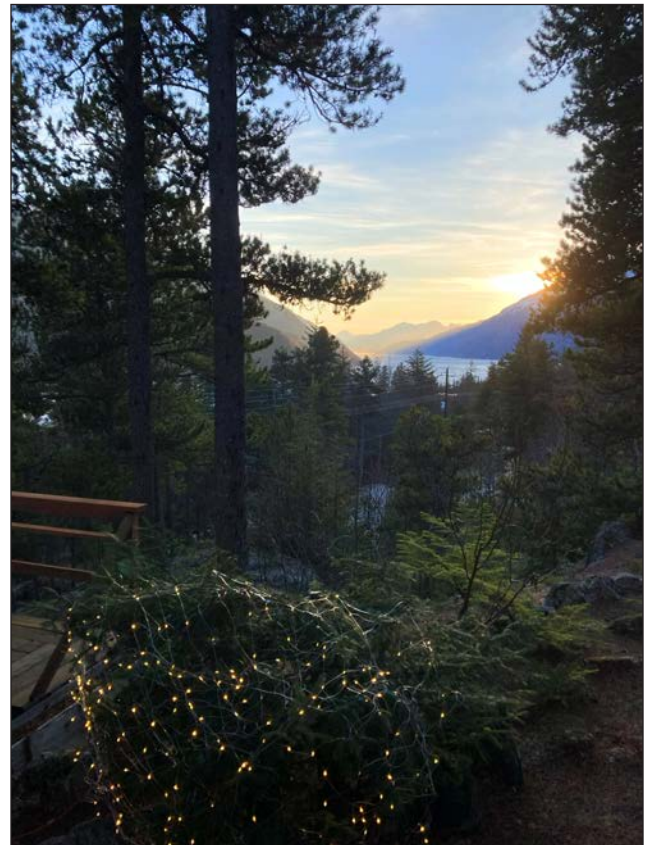
fogged in, or clear as a bell, you really can't beat it. These pictures show the "sunshine" view. This is what I see each sunny day, sitting at her dining table facing south - hello Colville, about 1,800 miles south by road. The one on the left is the sun peeking up over the mountain, of course in the east at 1:50 p.m. Which makes the one on the right having the privilege of putting the sun to bed, in the west at 3:48 p.m. with the Chilkats in the background. This is just four days before the Winter Solstice, when the two hours of seeing the sun will be even less.

Note: I had to take the pictures ear-

lier than the 21st because the weather forecast was cloudy and rainy. Mother Nature, most likely, will not mess with the forecast since it has been that way for a few days. You know what?!? I am pretty sure she will be adding a north wind into the mix just because she is a fickle female and can change her mind whenever she wants to.

Have a safe and happy New Year.

Becky is a mother, grandma, and great-grandma who is all about family and friends, loves northeast Washington, and follows the mantra: "It is what it is and it will become what I make it."



New Year's Resolutions

By Rich Leon

Part of my article in the December 2023 issue of this publication was about New Year's resolutions for 2024. Looking back on that article, I wonder how many people who did my very informal survey kept their resolutions. I never had any way to follow up with any of them because I never took any names.

Did the young lady who wanted to find a boyfriend ever find the man of her dreams, or is she still looking for that special someone? Did the person who wanted to buy a house ever find anything affordable? Did the guy who wanted to get a better job find one so he could ask his girlfriend to marry him? If so, did she say yes or is he still looking for true love? Did the person who wanted to go on an ocean cruise ever get the chance to go? Was it as much fun as he thought it would be, or did the hurricane season keep him from going anywhere? So many questions and we may never know the answers, but we can always hope those resolutions all came true.

I found quitting smoking and losing weight the number one and number two New Year's resolutions, followed closely by eating healthy (which kind of goes together with losing weight). I

found these three by far the hardest to keep. People who stop smoking do well until they have some stressful event in their life and the first thing they do is reach for a cigarette. "One can't do any harm," they think; but one leads to two, two leads to three, and before they know it, they are back to half a pack or more a day.

Trying to lose weight and eating healthy can be just as hard as quitting smoking. A stressful event can cause you to start binge eating, and before you know it you have finished off a dozen doughnuts and a jumbo bag of candy along with a six-pack of soda.

Overall, I have pretty much kept my resolutions since I retired in 2010. Current ones are to keep doing the things I enjoy, such as hiking, gardening, photography, and mushroom hunting. I also wanted to redo my garden and some of my flower beds, which I was able to do in the spring. I wanted to make my flower beds more bird- and butterfly-friendly, and this year I will probably make a few more changes.

I did a lot of mushroom hunting starting in the spring, especially on Mt. Spokane. I did okay but not as good as in some other years. The fall season was late due to a very dry summer and

an especially warm September and October.

I did plenty of hiking. Some days I met some interesting people on the trail, and other days I would hike for hours and not see a single person. I had some animal encounters that turned out well but could have easily gone the other way. I hike by myself, which I have been doing for a long time but is probably no longer a good idea at my age.

I am now a year older, but in that time, I don't think I have gained any more wisdom. If something really bad should happen to me when I am out in the woods, I hope they put on my tombstone "He Died Doing What He Loved."

I hope if any of you made New Year's resolutions that they all come true. I am going to start on mine right after the first of the year and go out for a nice, long hike in the woods and see what sort of trouble I can get into to start the new year.

Rich Leon is a nature photographer, co-author of three hiking guides, avid hiker for the past 40 years and a maker of nature calendars, especially mushrooms, and can be contacted at richleonphotos@aol.com.

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Interact Is Going to Spain

By Vicky Broden

On June 14, 2025, 17 students from the Rotary Interact Club at Colville High School, along with eight chaperones will travel to Spain. The Interact Club is a community service-driven youth group. (I'm their advisor.) We do about 500 local community service hours every year. You have seen us at the Candy Cane Lane, Zombie Dash, Colville Together clean-up days, serving at events, and more.

Every other year, we do a community service project abroad. This year we will run an English as a second language camp at Colegio Menesiano, a public school in the middle of Madrid, the Spanish capital.

Scott Anderson, a former student teacher at CHS, created the connection between CHS and Colegio Menesiano. Anderson taught English there last year and his students and several of mine corresponded.

The Colville Interact students who are going over are practicing songs, games, and science and art projects which they will teach to Spanish students ages five to 17. Besides learning the camp curriculum, Interact students will learn proper manners at the Spanish table, dress codes required at the school, churches, and museums, tips for riding the fast trains, travel safety tips like how to evade pickpockets, and the history and

culture of the cities we will be visiting.

To earn money for our English-teaching camp materials, Interact students sold Crandall's coffee as one of our fundraising activities. We made around \$1,000. It takes two years to raise enough money for students to travel. We do several fundraisers, such as auctioning deserts at the Rotary Christmas party, serving cookies at intermission at the Woodland Theater, doing cleaning jobs for RE/MAX Select Associates, selling baked potatoes, etc. The students, so far, have raised around \$15,000. This money pays for the students' train tickets in Spain, travel insurance, bus rental, and meals not covered by the tour.

After doing the community service project in Madrid, we will travel in a high-speed train to Seville. From Seville, we will do day trips to Granada, Cordoba, and Cadiz.

These Interact trips change lives for Colville's students, and they would not happen without the amazing support of the Colville School District, the Colville Rotary Club, local businesses, and private individuals who donate money and scholarships. This trip is truly a community project.

If you would like to help, please contact me at victoria.broden@colsd.org.



*This page made possible by the Rotary Club of Colville. Learn more at www.colvillerotary.org
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Ready, Steady, Go: Reset ... Renew ... Grow!

Article & Illustrations by Marci Bravo

Winter Solstice has marked the beginning of Astronomical Winter, and some of us in the Great North Woods are feeling it. Imagining winter in the land that my husband and I affectionately call Baja Canada often fills me with dread: long, dark nights make way into short chilly days. The sun frequently feels tepid at best and torpid at worst, trapped behind the eiderdown of fog and clouds, pinned by the inversion layer that blankets our hemmed-in valleys. The 3:30-4 p.m. sunsets never fail to surprise and dismay me, despite their daily habit. Gloves are essential, though often forgotten.

These are always the first things that come to mind when I'm anticipating

the seasons' progressions, as summer winds down or late autumn storms begin to strip the trees of their fall finery.

Then the first generous snow falls. It begins as powdered sugar that lightly dusts windshields, sidewalks, and my hair as I cross the street carrying a box to the post office. By the time I pull into my driveway, the snow has transformed into fat, feathery flakes that swirl and float endlessly down. They enshroud all sharp angles with-in plump, soft edges, and the world sparkles under the next day's sun, or the shine of the night's streetlights overhead.

At this time, another universal truth unfurls, just as tangible, and

much more enticing: **Snow equals FUN, quiet creativity, and its own thrilling beauty.**

There are the snow battles with my son and our excitable pup, and the potential of building snow forts with our neighbors. There's skiing and sledding with family and friends, up and down the hillsides of the nearby Dominion Meadows Golf Course or through the trails groomed by the USFS in the Colville National Forest. Quiet morning walks, just me and Kaslo; on Colville Mountain are gateways to awe in the wintry white world, and I can't forget the opportunities to explore the snowy landscapes around Sherman Pass or in nearby B.C. on the weekends.

Sipping steamy beverages invites my family to cradle my handmade mugs between our palms each morning, as we sit around the kitchen island and warm our bellies. Overcast days invite me to spend more time in my studio, which I lovingly refer to as the Mud Hut, relishing the mesmerizing spin of clay bodies between my fingertips and the satisfying feel of carving patterns into leather-hard clay.

Sunday evenings are cozy and sweet as my son and husband chop and cook up their weekly soup or stew in the kitchen, filling the house with savory aromas after a hard day of skiing. Then there are those clear nights that seem to magnify the sea of stars, which bloom above our backyard on frosty, moonless nights.

Why do I remember the worst parts of winter first, allowing dread to seep into my imagination? Why do painful moments often stain my memories, holding more power over me than the joyous ones – not just in weather, but



Creative Being in Stevens County

in so many facets of my life?

Perhaps we remember the difficulties and stressors as self-defense against future situations with potentially similar outcomes. But in this life, where mental stresses are usually only illusions to life-threatening outcomes, my mindset has not been serving me well.

When I became a mother, my hormonal surges led to a detrimental increase in anxiety, affecting my mental health and relationships. Yet I also understand the plasticity of my neurological system, the benefits of modern science, and that we as humans have the remarkable and redemptive ability to adapt and change at any age, if we work hard and stay focused.

Over the past four or five years, I have adopted habits and accepted help to keep my anxiety in check, thanks to patient and loving relationships, allopathic medicine, regular exercise, yoga, and mental healthcare. In this New Year, I'd like to articulate a new intention to lean into, habituate, and continue to transform my mindset for the better.

May I exercise my own self-awareness and check myself when I start to reflexively imagine the worst-case scenarios. May I catch myself, gently turn my eyes upward, and give grace to



myself for old habits dying hard. And then may I look around, wherever I am, inviting myself to revel in the sights and smells around me, the kind generosity and love of my friends and family to rekindle the trust I have in the Universe that reassures my hope in uncertainty.

May hope shine brighter than fear or dismay in the lives of all beings. Happy New Year.

Marci Bravo is a multi-media artist, wife, mother, teacher, friend and yogi residing in Colville. Follow her on Instagram @marci_bravo_makes.

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