

A Solstice for Cowzilla

By Marc J. Elzenbeck

When we last left our 3,500 pound purebred Holstein flight risk, we had upgraded the 4 foot high fence she had jumped, topping and criss-crossing it with electric wire. The group that hated the 100 mile-rated Zareba Energizer's power included Leslie Lou "Minnie" Moo, her new calf Nettie, our dogs, their boss ravens, and me. It only took once. You could hear it pulse, and a wet cedar twig would spark on it. One morning in the rain I didn't duck quite low enough under the gate. My jacket brushed the wire and it knocked me flat to the ground. Our pasture was as secure as Jurassic Park.

As Jeff Goldblum's chaos scientist said in the movie, "Life will out." At least one diabolical observer had noticed the obvious: a chain on a bolt was the only entry and exit, and the bolt was too short. Now, to say that cows have tongues is like saying Arnold Schwarzenegger has biceps. They can use their studded prehensile slabs to grip, wrap around and tear up reams of Timothy hay, and after watching us unlatch the gate a hundred times or so, she used that tongue to undo the chain and bolt, to do a Cowdini and navigate roads again to the nearest bull. This time she brought Nettie with her, who was 3 or 4 months old and still nursing.

The calf, Solstice

Paradise Valley is only a mile or so away as the crow flies, and Farmer George, his bull and their hundred-plus pasture acres were accommodating. It was like sending your kids to a summer camp or your highly active in-laws to Europe. (Who are in the south of France right now. The city of Nice.) As summer waxed, we agreed to share any offspring and enjoyed 3 months or so of blessed grass-growing peace. Farmer George was an old hand with cows, however, and it didn't take him long to say something about her being an oversized raging mutant, a less-than-ideal guest who repeatedly assaulted his Dexter bull. Whose lower stature, no matter how enthusiastic, was somewhat lacking.

After begging for a little more time, we used halters and ropes to walk our misunderstood romantic prize and her jaunty calf back into a newly bolted and locked pasture. Cowzilla was pregnant, so we indulged her accordingly. She ate with unbelievable gusto, growing even bigger and bossier. Mental note: acromegaly, which is what Andre the Giant had, might be a thing in bovines and I should have looked that up by now. Gestation for cows can vary by breed but is surprisingly similar to humans, about 280 days for Holsteins. Which would have put her calf into at least February, so when Christmas Break came up we left 1200 pounds of hay with a trusted young ranch hand and took the kids east to more sensible relatives.

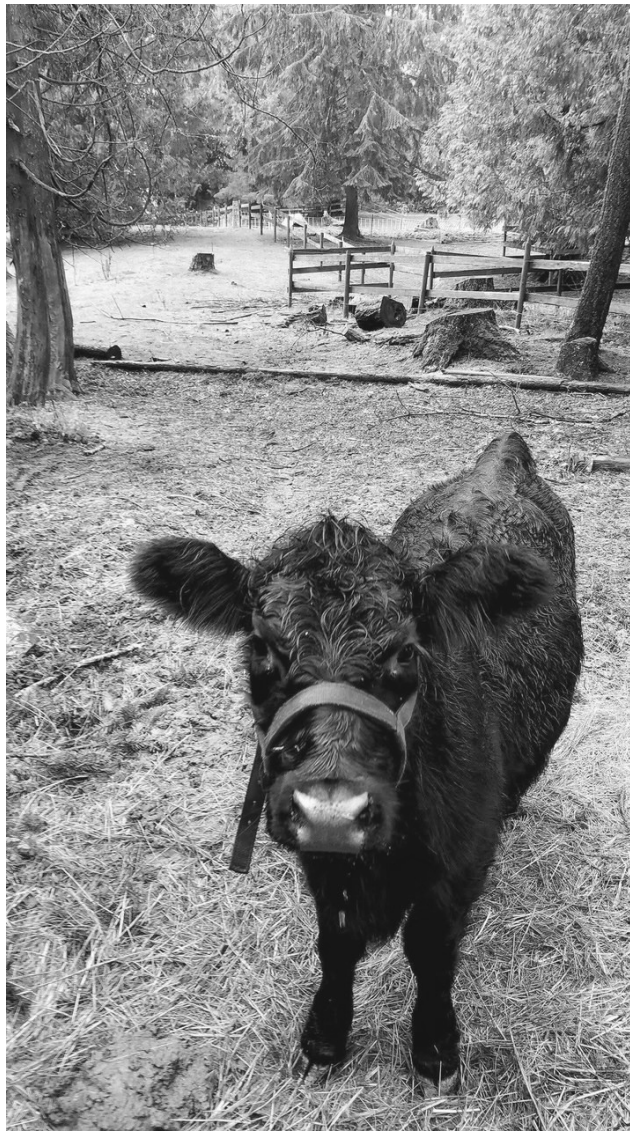
On the night of December 21st a swirling, huge, light-flickering rain and storm system splashed all over the Olympic and Cascade ranges. Coming up on midnight, we were with our cousins past Issaquah near the foothills of Mount Si. We were drinking and dancing. The game was to pick the most ridiculous disco songs of all time, play them at top volume and deny middle age with emphasis on the Bee Gees, ABBA, and Rick James. At some point I noticed my phone ringing. It was our ranch hand.

I stepped out into the gale and we yelled at each other. Cowzilla had broken the whole fence down. She and Nettie came up to the bedroom where he and a Polish guest were together. She

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Brrr. Photo by Claudia Hollander-Lucas



The Pursuit of Happiness

By Stephen Buller

'Tis the season to give thanks. I have many things to be thankful for; some I often take for granted, like a roof over my head and food on my table. Some that fill me with gratitude every day, like my wife and children, and some I feel lucky for, like being born to loving parents in the wealthiest nation in the world.

To that last point, there are some things we can't control - like the past, or organizations and institutions so large and corrupt that they take on a life of their own. That's why the biggest thing I'm thankful for in this moment is the freedom of speech and The Vashon Loop for allowing me to share my ideas with my community.

I grew up on Vashon, graduated VHS in 2003, and then escaped the Island's black-hole-like pull for a couple of decades, building my career, exploring the world, and (hopefully) growing as a person. After the disaster that shut down our country for two years and feeling all kinds of fear and insecurity, I brought my family back to Vashon.

The Island is special in so many ways, but most of all I love the community. The mix, personality, and size, leads to diverse views, fun events, and a place where (almost) everybody knows your name. It's just the kind of place I want to put down - or reinforce - roots.

Therein lies the problem. Home ownership has become increasingly difficult to achieve. What used to be considered The American Dream has become a pipe dream for many. Historically, the average home in the US cost about three times the average annual income; it is now seven times.

As it gets harder for people to enter the housing market, the wealth gap widens. At the same time as housing has been blown into a bubble, other assets owned disproportionately by the wealthy - such as stocks and bonds - have also

been inflated through currency creation, manipulated interest rates, and other central planning mechanisms, rather than allowing the free market to adjust.

Assets rise and fall in value for many natural reasons. But when the Fed began creating currency at rates never seen before to help (or paper over) the housing crash during the Great Financial Crisis of 2008, these assets abnormally skyrocketed in price. All the while, people said there was no inflation.

Prices were going up, just not at the grocery store. Newly created currency blew bubbles into these assets, and the Fed has been blowing them bigger ever since - with a few bumps as the free market fights back. Those who were smart or lucky enough to own these assets gained tremendous purchasing power.

Alas, the chickens must come home to roost. Unsustainable government spending, exponential currency creation, and derivatives of real assets (think stock options) have created a fragile system, a house of cards just waiting for one wrong touch. We even invented a new "asset" called cryptocurrency, which served as a pressure relief valve to the tune of \$3 trillion.

If I'm thankful for my voice here; I'm thankful for anyone who reads it. I'm also an amateur fantasy writer, and people seem to be having a difficult time distinguishing between reality and fantasy these days - understandably, in a world of such high technology. I believe it wise to think very hard about what is real.

The US dollar is not real money. If the tool we use to measure value of all other products and services in society isn't real, then prices lose meaning. The dollar has lost 99% of its purchasing power since the founding of the Federal Reserve in 1913. They are working hard to evaporate the last 1%.

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Our Local Democracy As Living Complexity

Vashon-Maury Community Council’s President’s Address

By JC Graham

Since its inception in 1933, our community council has had its ups and downs. Periods of coherence have been followed by dysfunction, or even disintegration, before – some time later – a new form of Council has taken shape.

That’s what happened in 2022, when V-MCC was created as a 501(c)(4) nonprofit, and again after last November’s annual meeting, when half of the six Board members resigned and our Council went into hiatus for seven months. (It resumed in July.) Since then, we’ve been rebuilding – bringing it back from the brink, really. Thanks to many volunteers, we’ve made great progress.

Yet even at its best, local democracy is a messy process. And that’s good!

In most civics textbooks, democracy is presented as a tidy machine for translating public opinion into law – checks and balances keeping excess and abuse in line. But in the real world, that picture has always been too static. A living democracy isn’t a machine that controls complexity; it is complexity maintaining its own coherence.

We’ve seen that here. During the recent government shutdown when SNAP payments were interrupted, Islanders spontaneously came together to meet the emergent need. Organizations and concerned individuals coordinated quickly to

prevent hunger from stalking our Island – an adaptive response that brought us together.

At V-MCC’s November 20th meeting, we had a panel discussion on food security – part of that same response – to share up-to-date information and further a systemic approach to ensuring that no one on our Island goes without food. We’re also forming an action-oriented Food Security Committee to institutionalize the effort, and I warmly invite you to sign up.

In this and other ways, our world is changing, and we’re coming together to constructively adapt. It’s part of the joy of living here.

This is just one illustration of a deeper truth. Across nature and society alike, resilient systems survive not because they suppress change, but because they adapt through it. Think of our ecosystem: countless species in constant flux, yet the forest endures.

The same logic applies to democratic life. Debate, disagreement, activism, protest, and procedural friction are not signs of breakdown – they are the self-adjusting motions that keep the whole organism flexible and alive. When a community or a nation grows tense, such disputations are how it learns.

Authoritarian systems treat diversity and dissent as noise that must be stifled. Democracy, at its healthiest, treats them as signals – information about who we are and what must evolve next.

You might think of this as “coherence through variety.” The pattern holds not because everyone moves in lock-step, but because our differences teach us how to remain continuously connected – like a murmuration of starlings, each responding to the movements of others while still maintaining its own place in the flock.

In human terms, it means building enduring relationships of mutual respect that can survive disagreement and divergence.

And this isn’t abstract theory; it’s visible right here at home. Vashon-Maury Island is a microcosm of this principle. Our Island networks – farmers and artists, commuters and volunteers, business people, elders, activists, and youth, everyone – form a small but intricate ecosystem of values and voices.

Our Vashon-Maury Community Council doesn’t stand outside that complexity to manage it; it is part of it. Each meeting, motion, and debate is one of those adaptive pulses through which the Island’s coherence renews itself.

Recognizing democracy as a living, self-organizing system reframes the work ahead for V-MCC. Our goal isn’t simply order or consensus; it’s sustained adaptability – cultivating structures and processes that can listen, learn, and adjust as our community’s needs change – as we have done since 1933.

The implication is both hopeful and practical: if we treat variety as our lineage rather than a nuisance, the Island’s self-determination can evolve toward greater resilience. Complex adaptive systems thrive on participation – and in that sense, each

citizen’s voice – your voice, even when discordant – is not noise in the process; it is the process.

Yes, we are stronger together – not because we are the same, but because we are different, each in our inimitable way. And because – with each of us contributing however we may – we are learning together how to live our democracy, collectively shaping the future in which, as Islanders, we’ll belong.

We are shaping a future where each of us has a place, where our differences are accepted, and where our community makes room for everyone. It’s not just a future that arrives; it’s one we create by living it forward, step by step – by showing up, speaking up, listening, and taking responsibility for this place we share.

So as we move into community conversations and the year ahead, I invite you not just to observe our local democracy, not just to be a spectator to the decisions that shape this island, but to inhabit it – and to make it your own.

JC Graham can be reached at President.v-mcc@proton.me.

It's That Time of Year Again

We have people sleeping outside who would like to be warmer.

I am collecting:

- Warm socks
- Gloves
- Coats
- Sweatshirts
- Sleeping bags
- Raincoats



Email Hilary Emmer
at hilonvashon@yahoo.com

Thank You!



Save Our Softball (SOS!)

By Andy Valencia

Most young Islanders are good at video games. The hand-eye coordination when you target and shoot, the reflexes to respond in the blink of an eye to a new threat. The ability to maintain situational awareness under stress – maybe it’s time to get outdoors, play in the dirt, and “touch grass” while experiencing the excitement of applying your skills IRL. What better way than to take the field for a lively game of fastpitch softball!

Community softball has been a fixture of Island life for as long as anybody can remember, and it’s been a varsity program at Vashon High School since 1979. However, the VHS fastpitch softball team faces a major challenge: its supply of younger players has nearly dried up. All VISD’s athletic programs rely on local recreational youth sports programs to train up elementary and middle-school kids. But in recent, years girls have been dropping out of organized sports at high rates, not just locally but nationwide. For VHS, it means there may not be a softball team after 2027!

In order to “Save Our Softball,” kids need to “Come out and play ball!” The VHS softball team is partnering with Vashon Youth Baseball & Softball (VYBS) to get girls excited about playing softball again. The new “Friends in Fastpitch” clinics will pair current high school players with younger athletes in a mentorship model, emphasizing the camaraderie of softball while practicing the skills of the game. The clinics are free of charge and will take place in January and February. Coaches Tess Carman (VHS) and Lindsey Gay (VYBS) encourage island families with girls ages 8-14 to register early at vybs.net.

Maybe your young athlete has never even thrown or caught a ball? Come and give it a try! No experience is needed and equipment will be provided (but bring your own glove if you have one). Coaches and mentors will start with the basics

of catching, throwing, fielding, and batting. Nothing beats the feeling of hitting a ball! Haptic controller feedback will never feel the same once you’ve done it for real.

If you already have experience playing softball or baseball, come dust off your skills and fine-tune your play. Tess Carman is the current softball coach at VHS, so this is a great introduction to varsity athletics.

After the free clinics, the spring season with VYBS runs from the end of March to mid-June, with practices twice a week plus games against other Puget Sound-area teams. As a community recreational league, VYBS prioritizes affordability: registration will be \$185 for the 11U team and \$230 for 14U players, which covers uniforms, equipment, field time, and safety training and background checks for coaches.

Are you and your young athlete interested? Visit vybs.net for more information and contacts. Lindsey and Tess hope to see you on the field!



VASHON ISLAND 2025

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The Vashon Loop

Editors: Caitlin Rothermel, Marc J. Elzenbeck, Jane & Andy Valencia

Contributors: Eric Coppolino, Daniel Hooker, Anne Cotter Moses, Michael Shook, Pam (aka Gates) Johnson, Seán C. Malone, John Sweetman, Dave B., Stephen Buller, Claudia Hollander-Lucas, Suzanna Leigh, March Twisdale, Craig Bailey, Ali Elsberry, JC Graham, John Valencia, Lynn Carrigan, Lynn McClain

Comments: editor@vashonloop.com
Placing ads: sales@vashonloop.com

Distribution: The Vashon Loop is a monthly newspaper, with 3,000 copies printed per issue; the paper is distributed to multiple sites throughout Vashon-Maury Island, and all content is also available at our website.
<https://vashonloop.com/>
December 7, 2025

Address: The Vashon Loop, P. O. Box 2221, WA 98070

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So Now I've Used AI

By Andy Valencia

I was writing an article about some undeveloped parcels of Vashon land that are on the market. In case you don't know, building on Vashon has a history of being expensive and fraught with regulatory delays and other surprises. People might be thinking about building, and an article on the subject could be helpful. Perhaps things have improved in recent years?

I knew there had been recent outreach from the county, seeking to hear what would-be developers found most challenging. This is where my article went sideways. Who gathered this information? Where did it go?

The King County Council folk I asked hadn't heard of it. Neither duck.com, nor startpage.com, nor even the paid search engine kagi.com did any better. In a previous article, I wondered if Big Tech was dumbing down their search engines to force AI usage. Here was a perfect test of my theory:

"Did the King County Council ever reach out to developers, seeking feedback on challenges in permitting?"

"Yes, the King County Council has sought feedback from developers on permitting challenges. In December 2024, the Council approved legislation to streamline the permitting process, reducing review times from 119 days to 65 days, sponsored by Councilmember Sarah Perry. This followed collaboration with the Department of Local Services, indicating engagement with stakeholders, including developers, to address long-standing permitting concerns. Additionally, the Permitting Division has a proposed development code open for public comment until July 9, 2025, which includes input from developers and other stake-holders."



Notice that it gave me not just an answer, but enough context to verify its accuracy. It included URLs, which I didn't bother pasting here. One URL was expired, but archive.org resurrected the content. This AI-generated answer is factual.

Also notice how, without guidance, it made the connection between legislation, collaboration, and stakeholders. It connected the council (legislative branch) with the permitting folks (executive branch). It found the most recent relevant activity, including one proposal currently in development. It winnowed it to just things in our county.

AI has a long history of fraud, including 1700's "Mechanical Turk," which had a chess-playing human hidden inside the "machine." But there is no reasonable collection of humans who could have been used to generate this answer, much less in the 10 seconds Grok took. We are living with things that can create answers based on not just information, but meaningful associations. The result is a clear, pithy, well-formed paragraph with literate sentences. And it's accurate.

Is this an article about Andy becoming an "AI believer?"

When I visit family, many of these households have a TV on all the time. Our house never has media on, except while we're sitting and watching a movie. I'm distanced from what passes for "normal" in mainstream media, and I find myself staggered when, lacking the incremental desensitization, I'm expected to

participate in human conversation while a howl of attention-grabbing madness spews "modern programming."

And so, never having used AI, I can look at it with no previous experience coloring my perceptions. I asked it a difficult question, and it answered with superhuman competence. I, personally, hope to never use AI again. But I'm an outlying data point. For purposes of information, nobody needs to talk to anybody else ever again. Just ask your AI buddy.

This has consequences.

We can expect that people will be less and less interested in knowing things. If nobody asks you anything, and you never get answers when you ask your fellow human - what's the point? I predict AI's presence will hollow out the notion of humans being a source of information.

In fact, I now realize that this is already happening. A corollary is that people will seek to not be reachable, and will generally deflect e-mailed questions rather than answer them. Again, something that is already all around us.

We can look a little further out and see the impact on our economy. We were all supposed to become "information workers" when we off-shored our industry. The mother of all information workers has now arrived, and the job pool of human information workers will bifurcate. In things like government, there will still be employment - but of people who will avoid you until you give up and ask AI. A sinecure.

In private industry, the number of employees will shrink in wave after wave. After being gaslit for years, the news is finally announcing the withering of jobs for younger generations. Just four years ago, Joe Biden told pipeline workers to learn how to program - dead advice with the advent of AI's "vibe coding." What happens to a culture when it tells almost all of its military-age youth that they're not needed?

That would be a policy question. There is no reason to assume that the AI which can assemble and correlate

information will be good at high-level problem solving - at forming wise, humane policy. Perhaps you think we could still look to humans for societal policy, which is then handed to AI for implementation?

The best policy-makers start with a massive body of knowledge, assembled as they worked their way up through successively more important jobs. Knowledge is the basis of understanding, which is then used by one's intelligence to make wise decisions. Without knowledge, there's no understanding, and nothing for intelligence to apply. The chain is broken.


Running with my hypothesis that government jobs would still exist, we'd expect to still see people with credentials and grand titles. With neither knowledge nor understanding nor wisdom, they would seek to avoid responsibility. When forced to make decisions, they would usually make poor ones, with disastrous consequences. All signs are that this is already happening. It makes me wonder, how long has AI been available within the government?

What I believe about AI is that we're at a point where it's hurting people. A libertarian by default, I have no problem with fentanyl laws, nor with sexual discrimination and harassment laws. When the powerful are in the process of laying waste to the lives of vast numbers of people, it's time for hard questions to be asked, and hard answers to be enforced. Nobody's liberties entitle them to topple the civil order, and that really might be what's unfolding.

Vashon! The DSHS Van will be here**Weds, December 17th
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

Attention: Many people have been getting letters from DSHS ... some rules are changing in 2026. Check your account to make sure everything is up to date and you meet any guideline changes.

At the Food Bank
(10030 SW 210th St)

**The Vashon Loop is published monthly**

A Solstice for Cowzilla

Continued from Front Page

thumped her head on the outside shingles hard enough to make them come outside. The cows mooed and galloped alarm all up and down the quarter mile drive. The confused young couple followed and looked in the wind and dark to find what was wrong, finding nothing. When they had finally gave up and came back to the house, a glistening black calf they hadn't noticed before was waiting for them on the porch.

They took her into the foyer onto the flagstone and wrapped her in towels. Nettie, who was still nursing, who was too young to get pregnant and too young to carry anything to term, had just given birth to a 28 pound preemie. We called her Solstice.

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... Miles and Miles of Texas

By Michael Shook

Against all rational judgment, my wife and I again traveled. One would think our journey to France last spring would be enough to put us off of it for a few years, but it was time to visit friends and family in the GREAT STATE OF TEXAS! Which is kind of how lots of folks down there say it, or if not saying it, think it (though it's by no means true of all residents – it's more diverse than one is led to believe).

But, they do love their state. One sees the Star of Texas – a five-point star in a circle – pretty much everywhere, on trucks, cars, houses, businesses, and clothing. I'm sure many sport a star tattoo as well, but I wasn't interested in asking strangers about it.

I had never been to Texas before meeting my spouse, a native thereof. But Texas and I are forever linked, since my paternal grandfather, Levi, was born there in 1861. His parents had traveled west to get out of the worst of the war, which did not stop my great-grandfather, William, from joining up with the Texas 5th Partisan Rangers Cavalry.

From what little history I could find, they spent most of the war in Oklahoma territory, fighting here and there, or were used to round up deserters.

But, back to Texas. I've been there three times now, and can testify with certainty that it is one amazingly flat place. What's called a hill there we would not even notice. And it is large. Owing to the flatness, one can gaze for miles in just about any direction, and it just keeps going, and going, and going. Also, it's hot. Way too hot. We were there in mid-October, and the temperature in Houston was 95 degrees.

It does have some mighty pretty trees, though. In Houston, I nearly swooned to see and touch huge old live oaks. They have wonderfully thick branches, often swooping gracefully down to the

Island Voices

ground twenty feet from the main trunk. Noisy long-tailed grackles, resembling fancy crows with their plumage, hopped about in them. And Loblolly pine, tall and graceful, wearing light green, feathery needles, trunks clad in vigorously plated red bark. (Sadly, neither tree will grow here.) There were also crape myrtles, shrub-trees with five to seven or so multi-trunks displaying soft grey, tan, and brown exfoliating bark. Lovely. (Crape myrtles will grow here, so they're on my "to get" list now.)

Houston's highways look like so much overcooked spaghetti, whirled and thrown over acres of flatness, many roads suspended 75 feet or more in the air, on supports decorated with, yes, the Star of Texas – but there's miles and miles of it, so it didn't feel too awfully crowded. At times, it was a challenge to figure out which spaghetti strand to take, since the signage was subpar, but we managed.

Other than the Houston area, roads were mostly straight. And of course flat. And everyone drives 80 mph, at least. Which is good, because as mentioned, Texas is huge, so even driving 80 or more, it still takes a while to get someplace. Fortunately, to accommodate all that fast, long-distance driving, gas is about \$2.75 a gallon. Fill'er up, and put the pedal to the metal!

The best part of driving in Texas, in addition to the speed and cheap gas, is that they love their roads. Texas roads are like silk. Our roads are like something from an automobile's nightmare, imbued with potholes, patches, spalled concrete, jarring bumps, all pervaded by a sense of slow decay. Additionally, they are so overcrowded that I fully expect my brother's traffic theory to come true someday; one more car will try to merge, and that will be it, the entire highway, freeway, on-ramp,

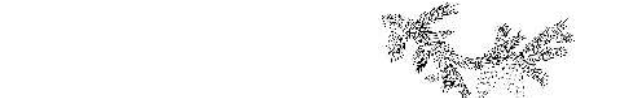
off-ramp, feeder street mess will come to a dead halt, locked like a puzzle, all up and down the state, possibly into Canada, and California, transforming the system from a series of roads into a vast, glittering parking lot. Not in Texas, though!

Before we left Houston, we had lunch at Katz's Deli. Oy, to have such a deli here. The sandwiches, stacked high with pastrami, were superb, the matzoh ball soup to die for, and the desserts! I finally met my match in a huge piece of seven-layer chocolate cake – of course it was huge, this was Texas – with some kind of frosting that was from heaven, or a place nearby. I could not finish it myself. Just could not. It felt like a reckoning with mortality, the first time in my life of 71 years that I've ever pushed away a dessert (a chocolate one no less!) and said, "No mas." A poignant moment, life catching me up after all, but I can't complain. I've had a pretty darned good run, for years eating my fill of whatever I wanted.

We then made our way east and north out of Houston, headed up by Sam Rayburn Reservoir to the brother and sister-in-law's lake house. Still flat. Still hot. But a fun drive, lots of other kinds of beautiful trees, and of course, plenty of exceeding good flatness to enjoy.

Like the rest of the state, the lake too was huge – its surface area is 112,500 acres – and, as lakes will be, also exceeding flat. Much of it is absurdly shallow, in some places only 15-feet deep, though at full capacity some parts go down 80.

Since it was so hot, I thought some alligators might be about, but no luck, though we made a couple of excursions in the pontoon boat to look for them. No snakes were to be found either; no cottonmouths, no copperheads. I was disappointed. I'm not often in an area inhabited by potentially deadly reptiles, and was looking forward to having a gander at some. Still, we had a good time. Family, friends, eating lots of ribs, and cornbread, and peas. And when we got back to our hilly home on the Sound, it was 56 degrees, and raining. Hallelujah!



It's Better To Give Than To Receive

By Seán Malone and John Sweetman

Seán and I have been exchanging gifts for years. Usually, these are things we make or special odd things we acquire that would not make sense to others.

I suppose this may have started in our early childhood when we began thinking about Christmas in July or August by earning money picking berries, stripping cascara bark, and doing chores for neighbors. We made things with what we had and each gift for our parents, siblings, and others was something unique, made with consideration and regard.

The gifts were sometimes crude, depending on the young age and yet undeveloped skills of the sibling, but special nevertheless. Sometimes, older siblings were recruited by younger ones for help and had to display a certain "detachment" from the gift, as gifts were to be a surprise.

I always wondered about this "gift giving" origin and my sister and brother wondered along with me. The younger sister was too young to care at this point.

We had all been told the Christmas story, and all the churches were stocked with Christmas crèches with the holy family gathered around some hay-filled crib with the plastic or ceramic baby (Christ), along with some motley animals and three "Wise Men" with moth-eaten camels.

The deal was that these three wise men were bearing gifts from afar. We kids pondered the gifts of

"frankincense, gold, and myrrh" with some bemusement even at that time. At that young age, we questioned these items.

"Why didn't these guys bring oranges, walnuts, and that pecan brittle like we get?"

"After all, they were supposed to be wise men and came from afar ... wherever that was."

"Where is the caramel popcorn?"

"What about the Christmas tree?" All logical questions youngsters would pose.

Well, life passed on and we all grew up a bit, but the gift-giving skepticism remained. We always exchanged gifts, but while it may have been fun to get a BB gun and an erector set, it was much less fun to get socks and underwear. My sisters were happy with the new shoes, and once my little sister got a violin. She may have been happy, but the rest of us were not. The cats left the house during her practice. I think the violin went the way of the ill-fated accordion my other sister got one year.

My brother got a bike, which I borrowed often, and the downhill speed and lack of suitable braking eventually led to us both being Porsche fanatics, which, while dangerous, did not lead to a bad thing, so much as it turned out to be an expensive thing. After all, we had shared gravel burns and bruises, mutually did maintenance, and added "hot bike" things we ordered from comic book ads.



Years later, my brother gave me a Porsche 1600 super engine that we built up and put in my VW van I had brought back from Turkey.

Much later, my sisters and I were in Spain, and we naturally visited all the old churches from Pamplona to Seville and others obscure and further south. At one point, at an old church in Huelva, we pondered a question: "How is it that every church has a piece of the actual cross and various relics of the saints like a 'knucklebone,' but none have any relics of these original gifts to the Christ child?"

So, what happened to these valuable gifts of frankincense, myrrh, and gold? No church had any of these in those little glass alcoves. If these Eastern wise men had been wise, they would have brought the new mother a bunch of clean nappies, a hot meal, and day care. But no one knows what became of these gifts.

We've found the shroud of Turin, but no one has found a used diaper from that birth. There must have been quite a pile of them, judging by our experience with baby things. Go figure. So, our skepticism was aroused, but not in the sense that gift giving was invalid or not to be observed.

Seán and I keep up the spirit of gift giving every year. We make things for one another. One of my most treasured gifts from him was a simple bird suet feeder, made of zinc screen and copper wire. Despite the gnawing predations of our squirrel clan, it has stood up to task.

One year, I made Seán a doorknob out of a particularly neat

piece of naturally curved madrona (and better yet ... installed it), and another year I made him a crow to put on his deck. It was made from fine cedar I snagged from the L&S scrap bin. Last year, he gave me a bottle of Sarvis berry wine he had made 20 years ago. It was still good, even excellent! And better yet because I may have helped him harvest the berries. We probably still have stains from picking. Small gifts, but meaningful.

This year, I'm working on something for him that I've got to get finished so I don't have to resort to giving him socks and underwear. We can't afford the "myrrh, frankincense, and gold" thing, but sometimes a decent bottle of our favorite single malt scotch shows up. And we give a toast to have another Christmas together.





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Board or Not?

By Dave B.

Marketing is an endless stream of figuring out a way to sell your clothing line, used car or boat, a campaign for a position in government, and pizza. It is expensive and can be a large part of a small businesses’ bottom line. Here on Vashon you have various options, including The Loop, The Beachcomber, and the sides of our buses running up and down Vashon Highway.

But what do folks do? They utilize sandwich boards and signs stuck in the ground on various roads in numerous quantities. I have heard all kinds of pros and cons on this subject, so let’s wade in.

First, does it work? I think so. After passing “Gomer for President” fifteen times on Vashon highway six days a week, it becomes engrained in my little skull. I should vote for Gomer, right? He has something going, right? Kind of like Taylor Swift songs.

It’s not that I WANT to look, but it is like a magnet. “Look at me, look at me, look at me.” Come on, admit it, you are curious when a new one goes up, as to what it says, yes?

Second, will you buy, rent, go see, or vote for the company, movie, or candidate that you observed on your way to Island Queen? Maybe. It is not my place to say, but if you have no idea who is running for XYZ district, and the ballot is in your hand, who

stands out? Yep, sandwich board candidate!

Does it detract from our Island’s beauty? Now, there is the key to this situation. Yes and no. My opinion is the grey area in-between. I understand Vashon is fighting for your almighty dollar, rental, or vote, and we DO NOT have those large, obnoxious billboards along all our major arteries like in the city centers. That is a good thing, and also, I think that as much weight as these billboards have, they might fall over in our sandy soil.

We do need to maintain and grow our businesses here on Vashon and keep this place clean and beautiful at the same time. Can we agree to do this? Can we just minimize the AMOUNT of signs folks put out and then also TAKE THEM DOWN when the election is over, the business is successful, and the movie is long gone?

It drives me crazy that politicians take months to get their team to take down “Gomer for President” campaign ads. If you can put them up, then be responsible and take them down.

What do you all think? Do you have signs out currently and how do you feel about this subject? Has it been successful for you and your endeavor? Please write to DaveB@idontcare.org. Kidding ...



Surgery Is A’Comin’. What Do I Do?

By Pam “Gates” Johnson

Lucky me. I’ve been having trouble with my stupid feet for a few years. Foot doctor, neurologist, and Joe Blow on the street all told me there is nothing they could do, so just get used to it. Pain and tingling and numbness worsened, and finally my primary care doc said, “I think it might be your back!”

That started the trip down Let’s Rule Out Stuff Lane, with stops at the orthopedic doctor, x-rays, steroid shots in the spine, and an MRI. Final decision was, “You need back surgery.” At last, there was a plan.

I’ve had plenty of surgeries in the past, but none needed all the “pre” stuff now required, probably because now I’m old. First stop was my “Periop Surgical Home.” That involved a trip to the hospital for EKG and blood tests and a nose swab. EKG was a little wonky due to high blood pressure caused by sitting on the dock waiting for the ferry (which was also sitting at the dock). That would raise anybody’s blood pressure. But just to be sure I was okay, they gave me a form to log my blood pressure three times a day for a week, then report back.

The swab showed MRSA bugs in my nose, so I was prescribed some gunk to put on a Q-tip and rub around inside twice a day for five days prior to surgery. A pain in the rear, but I can do that.

Since I live alone, there were arrangements to be made for some sort of after-care. I went to a rehab place after surgery once and it was the worst! No thanks on doing that again. I asked my daughter if she could get time off work and stay with me for a couple of weeks. Bless her heart, she applied for and got FMLA, so that is taken care of.

I mostly sleep in my power recliner. In late August, it broke. Took two months for a repairperson to come fix it. With upcoming limited mobility, I need to rely on the chair. Two weeks ago, it quit working while I was in reclining mode. Had to call my nephew to come get me out. We put

new batteries in the remote and it seemed to work, but my confidence was shaken.

A few days later, I went to town and stopped at the recliner store. I told them my story and that I was afraid of getting stuck in the chair after surgery when no one was around. The saleslady said if the chair stops working, I should just climb out over the arm. I explained that would not be possible, as I would be recovering from back surgery. She told me to call repair on Monday, which I did. Repair said they could come out and look at it in January. My surgery is December 8th. No bueno. Let’s hope it keeps working.

The Periop place gave me a list of instructions of what to take, what to not take, what to do, and what not to do. There were so many prescription things I had to make a calendar to keep it all straight. No supplements a week before. Take this healing concoction twice a day for the week before. No ibuprofen but Tylenol is okay.

I’m now down to the week before. Just to make things interesting, I hosted 11 people for Thanksgiving. Perhaps not the smartest thing I have ever done. But all the prep and cooking and pie baking (about 15, I think) took my mind off the upcoming procedure.

As I was working in my kitchen, I watched a woman in a Subaru drive straight into the ditch in front of my house. She put the front tire in the ditch, then instead of doing the smart thing of stopping and trying to back out, she tried to power it forward. All that did was put the back tire into the ditch, too.

Just by chance, my son drove up. The car angle was so severe the lady couldn’t get the door open. Jake opened the door and pulled her out. She said, “I have to go to Seattle for Thanksgiving with my son,” grabbed her dog, and took off walking down the road toward the highway. The car was towed out the next day.

My anxiety is on the upswing. This is a pretty big and complicated procedure. I did a bad thing

and started Googling all the risks and possible side effects. Of course, that increased my anxiety. When I told my daughter, she yelled and said to stop. She was right. I backed off Googling and am feeling a little better.

The day after Thanksgiving, I went to my last water-walking class and said, “See you in a few months” to my pool pals. Went home to finish up washing the pots and pans and clean up. After rinsing the last pan, I looked down at the floor and noticed a big puddle of water. Oh crap! Opened up the under-sink cupboard and discovered the sink had been leaking for some time. Big stinky mess!

I couldn’t call my nephew because he and his wife were out of town. Called my son, and he was off-Island. Son said to call my favorite handyman, so I did. Couldn’t believe it, but he was available and came right over. The leak was an easy fix. He even had the part in his truck. The gunky mess under the sink was another story. He removed all the bottles and soggy boxes and scooped out the goop. I set up a fan to dry up the cupboard, and all was good.

I sat down, put my feet up, and checked my email. A notice from my bank saying there was a questionable charge on my debit card. Does one believe a random email from one’s bank? I checked my account and saw two charges I did not make. Contacted my bank and they shut down my card. Of course, that is the card that all my on-line automatic payments use.

The icing on the cake was getting my mail and finding out I have been selected for King County Superior Court jury duty! On December 29th. I have to get my doctor to send a letter to them saying I will not be able to serve.

Oh, I forgot to mention that you have to get an okay from your dentist before surgery. I just changed dentists and the new guy found I needed a root canal and an extraction and that I had an abscess. All that had to be taken care of in about four weeks. It did.

Barring any other weird happenings in the next week, I should be good to go under the knife next Monday.



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Art and Music – A Meditation That Affects Our Hearts and Collective Minds

By Daniel Hooker

We in society have been molded and shaped into a form by words on paper, visual art, and music that resonates in our souls.

When I was a young man, I returned from Europe, with my mind, body and soul changed by all that I had experienced. I came home to a little coastal community called Bolinas in California, a town that saved itself through art and music. It was place where I would meet a musical influencer of the sixties and seventies, Country Joe McDonald, one of the musicians who graced the stage of Woodstock with his iconic song, “I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag,” that satirizes the horrible war in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Joe McDonald would stop and chat with me in the streets of Bolinas for 15-30 minutes, unhampered by time, always being present and in the moment. Seven years would pass until we met again, not by chance, but by the grace and forethought of my German wife, Uta, who knew I knew him from Bolinas.

I had seen a poster in the town square of Erlangen, Germany, and pointed it out to her (this was in July, and the concert was in December). By the time I had returned to Germany from California, my life had changed from being an able-bodied man to one who had undergone knee surgery and had become a father-to-be.

One evening, Uta announced to me, “Get dressed up. We are going out!”

Our unscheduled night outing had me nervous, as it involved a drive in the snow to the outskirts of Nuremberg. As the miles went by, finally, we arrived at our destination, a beer hall with a billboard declaring that Country Joe McDonald was playing tonight. My eyes got wide, my heart beat with anticipation of hearing a friend (acquaintance) from sleepy Bolinas, California. Except for the concert video of Woodstock, I had never heard Country Joe perform, and this night was a new

experience that would forever change my view of music.

The first set was slow, with the hall partially packed with 80-100 people (with the capacity for 300-400). The crowd was less than enthused, only knowing a legend from the Woodstock film.

During the break, I walked up to Joe, and tapped him on the shoulder, saying, “How’s it goin’, Joe?”

Joe spun around, recognizing my voice, his eyes and face beaming with delight, questioning the reality of a face so out of place, from a town thousands of miles away.

Joe said, “What the hell are you doing here!”

I explained that I had just gotten married, that my wife and I were expecting a child, and she had bought tickets to his show. Joe and I caught up. Leaving me, he walked up on the stage, instructed that the spotlights be directed towards my wife and I, then he introduced us. “I would like to give a shout out to my friend, Daniel Hooker and his wife, Uta, from Bolinas, California, who are expecting their first child!”

With this introduction the small crowd erupted in cheers and applause, changing the dynamic and the connection to the artist featured there that night. Joe announced, “The next five songs are dedicated to my friends, Daniel and Uta.”

After this intro, the spirit of the concert changed, and instead of 100 people listening to bygone music, the energy shifted to a feeling of a sold out concert, where everyone knew the words of each song being played.

Music and art moves us, connects us, as a human race, through spirit, through its beating heart. The power of art and music

Recently, I interviewed musician Colin Andrews and Island musician Gregg Curry. They passionately spoke about the role of music in influencing the mood of films we have enjoyed throughout life, the nuances of each scene being

brought closer to our emotional mood by the music, while anchoring our hearts in the moment. Collin spoke about how a movie with the proper orchestration delivers the passion of each scene, moving us into an alternate universe, experienced through emotions and celluloid.

Gregg Curry’s interpretation of “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” spoke of Jack Nicholson’s portrait of a man changing the perception of the patients in an unkind institution, with strict rules and severe punishments that divided humans from humanity. Curry talks about the pivotal moment where Jack’s character points out that, if he can manage to lift and disconnect a utility sink from the institution’s floor, they, as a collective, might toss it through a window, creating a means to escape the institution.

None of the patients come to help. Jack’s disobedience is met by the inevitable. He is silenced with a lobotomy, and seeing this, Chief, the Indian character in the film, tears the sink up from the floor, and, tossing it through the caged window, breaks free of his institutional life. Claiming his freedom, he runs into the forest alone.

Gregg said, “For an artist to impact the world, they must first transform themselves – make the world you want be true in you. Then live that world and express that world in the wider world. The life you live is the art you create and the world you make.”


Gregg’s point is that one man can have a vision to change something but until we as a collective society make the actual movement of changing our circumstances, we are nothing but – and these are my words – “a pond of stagnant water.”

Through the experience of the film, empathy is transferred into our hearts.

How does the influence of art and music, move us into adjacent realms of reality? This is what I want to explore with my readers, my community of artists and musicians.

From spiritual beliefs, meditation practice, and purpose, how are our vibrational hearts moved? How do we as humanity evolve and resonate as glasses of water, filled up and played as if by a fingerprint lightly circling our glass of life?

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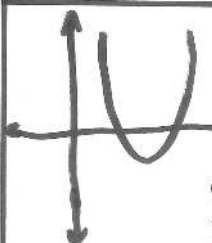
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Time Together – Fir Wreaths

By Ali Elsberry

I just love the nostalgia that comes from inhaling the wonderful scent of fir this time of the year. When I was young, we always went to the local tree farm in the tiny town where I grew up to find our Christmas tree. We’d load up in our heavy jackets and tromp through the rain-saturated fields to find the perfect one to take home. This typically involved my dad standing around smoking his pipe and holding the saw while my mom hunted down the fullest, fattest tree on the entire property so that stringing lights would be as easy as possible. All she would have to do was make a few passes around the tree and the lights basically strung themselves.

My sister and I would play a game where we would take turns hiding in the bushiest tree we could find, and then try to search each other out, like hide-and-seek, but with a twist ... sometimes an unsuspecting family came to inspect the tree you were hiding in.

And when the tree was finally set up in the house, I vividly remember that delicious smell permeating the entire upstairs level.

No matter your childhood memories of Christmas trees or not, that smell is really special, and one of my favorite activities with my children at this time of year is to incorporate it into greenery and wreaths to decorate our house.

This wreath is quite simple, but turns out really cute. You will need cardboard, sturdy scissors, string (length roughly 8 times the diameter of your wreath), fir boughs, and whatever other natural materials speak to you. I let my children each pick their own materials so that their wreaths have a unique and meaningful result. The following steps can easily be done by most ages with a little guidance.

Start by making a wreath frame from the cardboard, I have found the simplest way to do this is to trace a salad plate onto your cardboard, cut it



out, then place a teacup plate centered inside the circle. Trace around that and cut it out as well (you can use dinner and salad plates in the same way for a larger wreath, but a smaller size tends to hold up better in the long run).

Take one end of your string and tape it to the cardboard, leaving about 5” loose, then loop the other end around the cardboard, going from the outside through the inside and back out again, pulling taut and leaving approximately 2” in between each loop, until you have wound around the whole circle and come back to the other end of the string that you taped in place. Remove the tape and tie both ends of your string together, and snip the ends to about 1/2”. Make a loose loop of string around the wreath and tie it off. This loop will serve as a way to hang it later on.

Begin making your fir bunch for the first spot on the wreath, lining up the ends so that you when you stuff them into place you will have everything going under the string at once. I suggest using fir at the bottom (this gives the wreath a nice fluffy base and works to cover up much of the cardboard so you won’t have bare spots later), then add smaller, shorter items from there.

Push the base of this bunch under the string on

top of your cardboard, working it all down far enough that needles/leaves/berries will be on both sides of the string, with less of them on the stem side than the tips and ends (this helps to keep things from moving out of place). We like to alternate the bunches so that every other or third one is repeating; for example, my daughter used two fir branches under a sprig of huckleberry, then she moved to the next string where she layered one fir branch under a stem of hemlock and some holly over that. Back to fir/huckleberry, and so on.

Work in the opposite direction you wove the string (if you wrapped the string clockwise, layer the greenery in that same direction, but work anti-clockwise so you can always access the next string as you move around the circle). Make sure your bunches are thick enough to fill the space and not leave any wiggle room under the string (otherwise it will fall apart when you hang it up). Keep working around the wreath in this way until you have gone all the way around, making sure your last bunch tucks under the string of the first one you did so that the ends are fully concealed.

Once finished, hold it up to check for any areas that look thin or where you want more material – you can add a bow, weave some moss into random spots, or just leave it as-is, and, if needed, shape the greenery around so that it falls into place nicely. These wreathes look great indoors or out, but they will last much longer if you hang them in a covered space outside in the fresh air. Anywhere near the front door works well so you can breathe in that festive smell every time you come or go!



Conversation With a Squirrel

By Suzanna Leigh

I had a conversation with a squirrel the other day. She was a native “Douglas” squirrel, brownish with a brownish-red underbelly. She seemed to defy gravity as she perched on the side of the shed, hind feet up, her head down closer to my eye level. She looked directly into my eyes and chirped at me for a long time. I stood entranced, clippers in hand – I planned to rescue the garbage cans from the ivy – and tried to reassure her.

I told her she is welcome here, that we mean her no harm; she continued to chirp at me insistently. What did she want? Sadly, I don’t speak squirrel. Finally, I asked if she wanted to show me something. Instantly, she dashed away and disappeared by the ivy-covered cans.

I think she didn’t want me to cut back the ivy. Perhaps she has maple seeds stashed there for the winter?

I am convinced that wild animals are much more aware of us than we are of them, that they recognize and remember certain people, and that they somehow intuit our intentions.

My first clue that the wild ones watch us intelligently was one morning several years ago, when I had the school. We often walked the block to Crow Beach. You know, the beach where people park to drink their morning coffee, where teens sometimes gather after school, and parents take their toddlers to play in the sand. We would look under the

rocks for tiny crabs no bigger than a child’s fingernail, play pirate ship on the big driftwood root system, or collect shells to sort and classify later. Then we would sit together on a driftwood log and eat our snack.

One day, I found a polished piece of moon snail shell – lavender, pink, and tan inside. I admired it for awhile, then I put it down. It was snack time. We handed out napkins, cheese slices, and apple pieces packed in orange juice. Oh dear, one child dropped her cheese in the sand! I gave her another, then I picked up the sand-covered cheese and tossed it toward the gulls at the water’s edge. One of the gulls snatched up the cheese as quick as a wink!

Soon, it was time to head back to class. As I bent down to help a child with his boots, PLOP! Something landed in the sand beside me. I looked up to see a gull fly off, then I looked down to see what went plop. It was the same moon snail shell I had admired earlier!

I think the gull was saying thank you for the cheese.

Then there was the time Tim Baer and I were doing Qigong on that same beach. As Tim and I did “cloud hands,” we noticed something odd in the water over by the Standard Oil dock. A fin? We walked to the dock to get a closer look. Something large seemed to be struggling under the water. Was it a sea mammal caught in an escaped fishing net? Was that blood in the water?

We stood on the dock, wondering how we could help. It didn’t seem safe for either us or the animal to approach it in Tim’s canoe or my dinghy. We watched prayerfully, holding it in the Light as Quakers do, until it got free. It was a sea lion! Moments later there were ten of them swimming around the dock. Inviting us to play? We must have watched them for half an hour before we needed go home for breakfast.

As soon as we said goodbye, the sea lions gathered together and swam

off a ways. The leader turned to us and barked ten times, once for each sea lion in the group, and they all swam off.

When I was a child, I was taught not to “anthropomorphize” animals. They don’t have any thoughts, only instincts, I was told. They are just dumb animals. I think that is a mistake. I think we need to listen to the animals. Perhaps they are teachers, as the Native Americans believe. At very the least, they are our neighbors.



Art by Lynn McClain





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A Community Requires People We Don't Agree With

By March Twisdale

Recently, I wrote an article for The Vashon Loop. A local business owner read the article, or a portion of it, and told a customer of his that he was (1) offended by the article and (2) would no longer offer The Vashon Loop on his countertop to customers. That customer also writes for The Vashon Loop. Distressed, he called me to share his own outrage at this Islander's decision, saying he would no longer be spending his money at this person's business!

And so the spiral downward goes. Unless we consciously choose better.

After acknowledging my fellow writer's feelings, I said, *"If you do that, how are you any different? Where does the spiral end? Continue to spend your money on his goods and services. By doing so, you are modeling healthy community skills."*

My plea was simple. Please continue to frequent this person's place of business - even though he's done something you disagree with. Why? Because, we have NO other option.

You, reading this sentence right now, disagree with every person on Vashon Island. So do I! Spend enough time talking to anyone and you will discover those differences. You and I and this business owner and my fellow writer are all worlds apart on one or more of our key values, morals or beliefs that define us.

This is a reality our society avoids adroitly.

Consider the adage to never discuss sex, politics, or religion at your place of work. In America, where we celebrate and cherish our individuality and differences of opinion, this advice makes perfect sense. An office that works smoothly and efficiently can be thrown into chaos or become a place of quiet distress if one person, especially the

Island Resilience

manager or owner, begins to spout off strong opinions in the workplace.

Business owners practice similar caution when engaging with customers. Doctors, massage therapists, therapists, teachers, and even baristas and housecleaners, typically keep their opinions to themselves.

This is a skill people need to have, should they wish to live peacefully in a diverse world.

Private is different than public. If you want to only be friends with people who vote as you do, worship as you do, or share a specific list of values, you can try to winnow your friends and family into such proverbial "haves and have not" categories.

But, in our shared commons? In our centers of commerce? Where we engage in necessary and desirable trade, recreation, and the work of building and sustaining a diverse community? There, we must leave our intolerance in the car, back home, or outside on the street.

Vashon has a long history of being relatively tolerant of differences. This ethos of "live and let live" has been captured by the popular and ubiquitous "Keep Vashon Weird" bumper stickers. It makes sense! How else does any community or family stay together, if not by tolerating individual "weirdnesses?"

We need tolerance. So does nature! You cannot grow a healthy, robust garden if you douse it in chemicals designed to murder all insects. Along with the aphids and coddling moths, you'll kill off the honey bees and other pollinators. Then, where will you be?

Let's come back to the heart of the issue.


Wedge issues are called such for a reason. They are meant to "drive a wedge" between people, families, and communities. But, what if we decide

to accept wedges? What if we throw the litmus tests out the window and accept that we are all fallible? What if we focus our attention on the virtues people bring with them? And not their sins.

Just as I can say, "Talk to someone you like long enough and you'll find something you disagree on," I can also say, "Talk to someone you dislike for long enough and you'll find something to admire and respect."

This is the reason why "cancel culture" is so caustic and destructive. It invites us to view another human as a single opinion embodied. A caricature rather than a deep and vibrantly dense person with a cascade of thoughts and opinions. It is also a lie we tell ourselves, to justify reactivity, tribalism, and other amygdala-dominated knee-jerk habits.

You and I disagree - and agree - on issues that matter deeply to us. I guarantee it. I am both a staunch ally and an opposing force to every person reading this article, depending on the topic. As are you, to me. And here we are. Sharing this Island together.

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The Pursuit of Happiness

Continued from Front Page

Maybe I'm just a man with a hammer, so everything looks like a nail. But if The American Dream is to return, I believe it will come on the back of sound money - that's gold and silver.

Another sentiment drilled into every American (I hope) is the concept of life, liberty, and property. It took me a while to understand why property (or estates) was included in John Locke's "Two Treatises of Government" (a foundational work of liberalism which rejected the monarchy), but my education in sound money gave me perspective: If you can't leverage your hard work for a better life, why bother?

"You will own nothing and be happy," then, does not make sense. Property is part and parcel to our happiness. The ability to enjoy the

fruits of one's labor is essential to a peaceful and prosperous society. Our Founding Fathers knew this, and their translation of "property" became "the pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence.

I don't think I will persuade anyone at the Fed, but I'm thankful to live in a country founded on principles so wise and true that I can see through the smoke and mirrors to what is real. What else can I do? I can work hard, cooperate with others, and share my vision for a better future.

There are two ways to own the nicest home in town: You can build it, or you can tear the others down. We can build more together than apart. Let's (continue to) build something to be proud of, together.

Thank you, Vashon.

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Countries around the globe are banning the use of agricultural chemicals, petroleum-based fertilizers, and GMOs. Yet, to this day, the U.S. continues to be one of the biggest consumers and users of these horrific chemicals. Around the globe, other countries are not only banning these chemicals and genetic modifications, but they are also preventing the import of these contaminated products.

If other countries won't allow these things across their borders, what are we missing? We invite you to seek your own answers. Try the documentary film, "Children of the Vine." Watch, read, or listen to recognized experts like Dr. Zach Bush or MIT Senior Researcher, Stephanie Seneff Ph.D.

It's past time to advocate for yourself and your family ...

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Smoothie Sludge Bread

Or, “What To Do With Smoothie Remnants?”

By John Valencia

We call this my “Smoothie Sludge Bread!”

The hiccup is that it requires the pulp leftover from my daily juices. But I guess if people do some juicing, then they’d have it on hand. And the backstory is really just that: I had this leftover pulp from my smoothies, and it seemed wasteful to just throw it in the garbage disposal, and we don’t compost. So this is the perfect use for it, and it makes undeniably delicious and healthy bread.

First, the bread recipe:

Bread Ingredients

Dry

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 1 cup chopped nuts (mashed almonds, flax seeds, raisins, dried cranberries, chia seeds, etc.)

Wet

- 2 ripe bananas

Mashed 2 cups smoothie pulp (fruit/veg blend — excess liquid squeezed out using a clean dish towel)

- ½ cup brown sugar
- 2 large eggs
- ⅓ cup melted butter
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

Directions

Prep

- Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C)
- Grease pan with butter
- Squeeze moisture from pulp with a clean towel so it isn’t too wet

Dry mix

In medium bowl: whisk flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and cinnamon.

Wet mix

In large bowl: mash bananas, add fruit/veggie pulp, brown sugar, egg, melted butter, vanilla. Stir until just combined (don’t overmix).

Combine

Fold dry ingredients into wet until just incorporated. Fold in the nuts and other add-ins.

Bake

Pour into loaf pan; bake 55-65 minutes.

Check at 50 minutes. A butter knife should come out mostly clean, but with some moist crumbs on the knife. It’s ok to be overly cautious and do multiple knife checks every 4 or 5 minutes to make sure it doesn’t bake too long and go dry.

Cool

Rest in pan 10 minutes, then remove and cool fully on a rack for a couple of hours before slicing.

Second, here is a pretty standard smoothie I make (but all types work for the bread):

Smoothie Ingredients

- Apple
- ½ lemon (including rind)
- Asparagus
- Red beets
- Carrots
- Ginger root
- Cucumber
- Blueberries

Use your imagination – there really isn’t any fruit or veggie off limits!

Butternut Squash and Ginger Soup

By Craig Bailey, “Fiddlehead Bistro,” Saranac Lake, NY

This vegan soup is great for a cold winter day with some crusty bread and a fire. It’s bright and hearty and warms from the inside. It can also be served chilled, but for me it’s all about warmth.

To get the meaty undertone, browning the onions is a necessity. It gives a depth of flavor that mimics meat stock. Crystalized ginger adds a sweet bite and enhances the flavor of the fresh ginger. It is best pureed, but can be a coarse soup if you cut your vegetables finer.

Butternut Squash and Ginger Soup

Ingredients

- 2.4 lbs (1100g) butternut squash (peeled and seeded*) coarsely chopped
- 2 (600g) large onions, coarsely chopped
- 2 (20g) cloves garlic chopped
- 2 tbsp (30g) fresh ginger, coarsely chopped
- ¾ cup (100g) crystalized ginger
- Salt



In a sachet:

- 2 tsp (5g) coriander seed
- 1 tsp (3g) whole black pepper
- 4 sprigs fresh or 1 tsp (1g) dried thyme
- 1 (3g) stick cinnamon
- 2 bay leaves

For garnish:

- Toasted pepitas
- Pumpkin seed or sesame oil
- Chopped fresh parsley

Directions

In a 6-quart pot cook the onion, stirring occasionally, until it gets to be a consistent brown. You can add a little water as they brown to even out the brown. Add garlic and ginger and sweat.

Add all the other ingredients, 5 pints of water, and a teaspoon of salt (you will salt to taste at the end also). Boil until the squash is very soft. Remove the sachet and discard.

With either a stick blender or a tabletop blender, puree the soup in small batches (I prefer the tabletop as it gives a smoother grind).

If the soup seems too thin, reduce over medium heat to get to the desired thickness; if it’s too thick, add water. Add salt to taste.

Toast the pepitas or squash seeds at 325° until lightly brown. Salt immediately before they cool off.

Place a portion of soup in a bowl and sprinkle pepitas or toasted squash seeds and some parsley and drizzle a little seed oil. As mentioned, crusty bread drizzled in olive oil works very well also.

Enjoy.

** You can toast and peel the seeds for garnish instead of the pepitas.*



Soft Dinner Rolls

By Pam “Gates” Johnson

Editor's note: This recipe appeared in the November issue. However, those of you who used it may have experienced some rapid-rising, bubbling rolls. We are reprinting the recipe, but with the proper amount of yeast! We apologize for the error.

My daughter-in-law Sarah loves these rolls. I make them for her every few weeks.

Ingredients

- 1 cup warm water
- 2 tbsp soft butter
- 1 egg
- ¾ cups bread flour
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 1½ packages dry yeast (about 3 tsp.)

Instructions

In warm mixing bowl, mix water, yeast, and sugar and let set about 5 minutes until yeast blooms. Scraping down sides, add egg and butter and mix well. Mix flour and salt and add

to the bowl. Knead with a dough hook for several minutes until all flour is incorporated and dough is smooth.

Remove from bowl and hand-knead a few times, then put in greased bowl, cover in plastic wrap and a towel and proof in a warm place until at least double in size, about one hour. Remove from bowl, punch down and knead a few times.

Grease 9×13” or larger baking pan. Cut dough into about 1.3-ounce pieces, roll in the palm of your hand and place in the baking pan. I use a scraper to make sure rolls are the same size.

Let rise in warm place until rolls are double in size.

Bake at 375 degrees for 14-15 minutes, until tops are brown. Remove and brush with butter.



The Story of Tomtomtidimiddletom

Part 4: Tom Has Babies

By Andy Valencia

The next morning, the car went out on another trip, but Tom didn't even pay attention. He could feel his body trying to push out a second flower, and he held it back even as his one flower gathered pollen and started trying to grab all his juices to form so many seeds. He stopped it with a firm "NO - only six seeds."

Why six? He didn't know, it just seemed like enough. But while he was distracted, that second flower tried to grow again! He was busy the whole day keeping his body under control, and hardly noticed when the car got back to the campground.

The next day was better, as the second flower finally gave up trying to grow, even as his first flower withered and the six seeds within it started growing. It made him so hungry! But he was now a tough little weed, and he let them grow while he took in sunlight to keep himself fed. Nobody talked to him, and he realized that they all thought he was dying. For a mercy, the car had only done a few short trips, sparing him all the wind and bouncing. At sunset, he went to sleep knowing tomorrow was going to be a big day.

He woke late, with the sun almost directly overhead. No driving around - perfect timing, because it was time. The pod he had formed split open, and presently he watched a seed float out and drift through the air before landing on the ground. Another seed floated out, and finally he had seen all six seeds land here and there throughout the campground. He had done it! Grown his seeds without dying. How long until he got to greet his children?

He watched each place a seed had landed in turn, even though it was far

too soon to see anything. One-two-three-four-five-six, he watched each spot in turn, then started over again. All the neighboring plants tried to talk to him, but he was too distracted to answer. It was a bit of a relief when the car started up and they left the campground, although he was also afraid he'd miss something! But he was being silly, it would take more time.

The next day the car was out and about before he had a chance to check his children. They finally returned late in the day, and he couldn't remember a single detail about where they'd gone that day. As they pulled into the campground - he saw some little bright green dots!

He looked and looked. Five of his seeds had sprouted. He called to each in turn, "Hello!" They didn't answer, but that was probably because they were so tiny. Then other weeds in the campground also called out to them, and Tom told them "Quiet!" He wanted to be the first to greet his children. But most of the plants kept calling anyway until a tree told them "Shuuuuuuuush" in a deep, windy voice. That made them quiet down. Nobody had ever been shushed by a tree before.

As soon as the sun came up the next day, Tom tried saying "Hi!" to them again. And then ...

"Hi!" said the one who had sprouted from the first seed; its voice was so high and squeaky that he could hardly hear it. The second seed heard and said "Hi!" back, and then the first one responded "Hi!" again, which got all five of them started. "Hi-hi-hi-hi-hi" went around and around for several minutes. Tom waited patiently, because young weeds know almost nothing, and

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repeat anything they hear.

Finally, they quieted. Then Tom said,

"I am Tom."

The sprout from that first seed answered, "Tom!" And then the next three children joined in with their own "Tom-tom-tom" answer. There was a pause, and then the last baby weed said "Tim!" Tom corrected it with "Tom", but it just answered "Tim!" again in its tiny, squeaky voice. (It ended up with the short name "Tim" and the long name "Tom-Tom-Tom-Tom-Tim".)

Suddenly, the other weeds joined in, answering the little weeds with "Tom! Tom! Tom! Tom!". And then - the trees joined in, "TOM! TOM! TOM!" in their deep, resinous voices. Even the humans, puzzled, came over near the car; they couldn't quite hear plant speech, but they could tell something was going on. The chant went on for several minutes. What a way to celebrate the births.

Even in his oldest age, Tom always remembered that morning with his first children and all the plants of the campground.



Farewell, Observant Frog

The Loop sends our farewell, and a hearty thank you to Alex Soriano for his comic, "The Observant Frog's Log," which has appeared in these pages since May 2024.



Best wishes to you, Alex, and to the Observant Frog!

Math Puzzle

By Anne Cotter Moses

Buckets

You have two buckets. One measures exactly 10 gallons, the other measures exactly 3 gallons. You can use as much water as you need, but you may only use these two buckets. How can you measure out exactly one gallon of water?

Math Puzzle Solution

By Anne Cotter Moses

Answer to puzzle: Fill the large bucket. Pour out the water from the large bucket to the small bucket until it is filled, and then discard the water from the small bucket. Do this two more times, and you will be left with one gallon in the large bucket.



Llaughing Llamas Chronicles

By Daniel Hooker

I went to psychic the other day, and knocked on her door. She said, "Who's there?"

I guessed she wasn't a full psychic, only a medium, so I left.

~

From Steven at the Library.

Q: What is a librarian's favorite type of mushroom?

A: Shhhh, talkies.

~

From Monet at Thriftway.

There were five ants that met. They moved in together, and together they became ten ants.

~

From Rachel at Ace Hardware.

When I was younger, I always wanted to become a Gregorian monk.

But I never got the chants.

~

Did you hear about the Island cabinet-maker who got arrested?

The charges were attempted counter fitting.

~

Q: What happens to Santa when he goes down a hot chimney?

A: He becomes a Crisp Kringle.

~

Q: What does Santa call elves who are in charge of Christmas music?

A: Metro gnomes, of course.

~

Q: What do you call a wreath of one-hundred dollar bills?

A: A wreath a' Franklins.

~

I was watching an old "Galloping Gourmet." The host being Australian, this time he was actually doing a broadcast from Australia, and he was making a meringue.

Everybody cheered after he finished doing his meringue.

I'm sort of confused, because I thought in Australia they boomerang.

~

Newsflash! A new, warmer than flannel pillowcase made of corduroy is in the news. It's making "headlines" everywhere.

~

Do you want to hear a joke about Potassium?

K.

I like to tell jokes periodically.



Special Aries (March 20-April 19) - Applies to ALL the signs

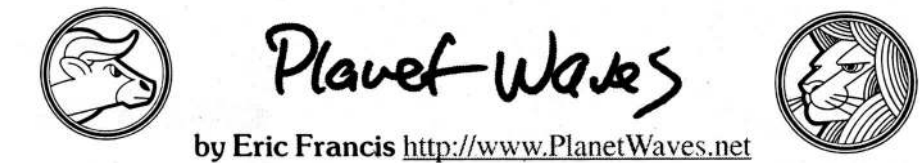
In some perfect world where I was a guest on Joe Rogan and he asked me to explain the astrology of why the world seems to be going off the hook, I would without hesitation say: it's the twin conjunctions in Aries. This is the thing that is unprecedented and which also describes the meeting of personal and collective influences. Any good interviewer would follow up: What are the twin conjunctions? The first is Chiron aligning with Eris. These are two relatively new discoveries, though few people know about them and few astrologers use them. The legacy they left us after their last conjunction in 1972 was identity politics. Neither planet had been discovered yet; the activism of that time ended in a fiesta of self-interest that has yet to end. And though Chiron was discovered nearly 50 years ago, it is still the edge of astrological progress. It's about an individual awakening to his or her reality. Eris represents the way that our psyches, individual and collective, have been electrified, digitized and purged of any sense of individuality. So Chiron is here to focus you on your true sense of existence. Then there's the other conjunction-the meeting of Saturn and Neptune. Though this happens every 35 years or so, it's never happened in quite this way. It represents something entirely new, unpredictable, and impossible to foresee. Yet for you personally, you will find your new self-orientation in a much wider context. You will have the option to step out of the false isolation we live with now, and into the meaningful territory of shared purpose.

Taurus (April 19-May 20)

The most amazing news of 2026 is that Chiron will be entering your sign. Taurus is the sign where Chiron was discovered in 1977, so we are beginning with the return of Chiron. The crisis of our times is likely something you find troubling as one of the most embodied and physical of the signs. And that crisis is people being driven out of their bodies by digital technology. This must make you extremely restless. The influences most responsible for this crisis are coming from Aries, which is like a hidden corner of your chart-hidden, that is, on the astral level. Chiron in Taurus will awaken the world to something already obvious to you, and clearly link consciousness to physical presence. Your body is where you experience physicality and also your full emotional spectrum, and the result will be a form of waking up from a weird dream you didn't know you were dreaming.

Gemini (May 20-June 21)

Among the rare and strange events of 2026, Uranus, the Awakener, lands in your sign to stay for the next seven years. For the past seven, this electrical and shocking planet has been keeping you up nights, burning its way through the dense territory of Taurus. So things that have gone slowly for you, and which could materialize, will seem to accelerate rapidly. The best way you can be ready for this is to relax and increase your situational awareness. There is no way to plan for Uranus in your sign, though one thing you can do is to know what you want. Please suspend any idea you may have that technology will save us. Sadly, technology is the problem, and we're not going to solve it by going in deeper. We will get through this



extended, wholly original crisis by remaining awake and alert.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

The incoming energies and "the cycles that be" are guiding a gradual but total rearrangement of your existence. This primarily involves what you are called to do in the world and moreover, how you respond to your callings. In the field of vocation, there are multiple revolutions happening that are serving to awaken your sense of purpose. This will, if you let it, replace your previous sense of duty. Your inner drive to serve the world is much more fun than any box or blanket of responsibility encasing your vital force. In your relationship environment, you are trying to figure out if Faulkner was right when he said that the past is neither over, nor past. This is your most important opportunity to see your early environment for what it was, to sort out samskaras (latent past impressions) and to step through the maze of history into the dawn of a bold new era in your life.

Leo (July 22-Aug. 23)

Though the process has been underway for more than a year, the top story for Leo is Pluto in your opposite sign, Aquarius. That is to say, your relationship house is under the influence of a planet often described as the unstoppable force. You must study your social reality with genuine care, as all the rules keep changing. The influence of antisocial media has turned people into robots and publicists, and the only reason we can tolerate what has happened is because it came upon us so gradually. If you are being called to do just one thing now, it's to make sure that your life is populated by humans and not by robots. Just because you project your warmth and humanity onto someone does not make them humane or caring.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sep. 22)

The question of the spiritual path is which voice you listen to; which you feed and encourage. You only have so many places in life where there are actual options. There is a revolution going on in the corner of your chart where you make and keep commitments. This is the same place where you are called to do much of your self-actualizing. Many people casually leave relationships "because they are unhappy." The movements you are experiencing (described up in the Aries reading) are calling on you to take responsibility for your experience. And they are calling you to do something that you might not like to do, especially if you think your life is about your "personal power." The first thing on your agenda must be sincerity.

Libra (Sep. 22-Oct. 23)

Could all of the rapidly accelerating instability, deception, meanness and madness come from one source? Never before have we experienced anything like a technology that infiltrates every corner of existence, every fact and facet of life, every relationship, every monetary transaction, every everything. You did not grow up in this world and you did not see it coming. You want to live in a world of elegance, balance and beauty.

You want people to be more sincere and easier to understand. The only thing you can do is be these things yourself. Conduct yourself in what you know are the right ways. Sincerity is essential, as is maintaining your commitment to beauty for its own sake. Be available to others when they need you.

Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 22)

There is a condition that I describe as "false lack of confidence." Your confidence level is lower than it should be, based on your accomplishments and your knowledge. This becomes a significant issue around the time of your next birthday, into late 2026 and most of 2027, and it may be the one thing standing between you and the best life you can live. Be just certain enough that you're never cocky and you're always prepared to put in extra effort to get an excellent result. You can remind yourself that you have what it takes. But there is no substitute for aiming a little higher than what you think you can do, and knowing you have what it takes to get the job done.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 22)

You may feel like you alone have a sense of the humanity's plight. That doesn't mean you understand it; but it means you have some perspective. True creativity is a form of leadership, and you are being taken to some deep places as something-perhaps artist, self-actualizer, adventurer, or risk-taker. However, in all of these modes of existence, it's easy to just go on climbing mountains or snowboarding or making paintings, the world be damned. Now is not the time to be self-serving or to work for yourself. All of our problems are collective, even if you don't think they affect you. You have tremendous talent and truly creative ability; make these gifts work for you, and for everyone else. Your magic will not evaporate if you stand up and help people in need.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 20)

Events in Capricorn are among the most unusual of all the signs, and that is saying a lot. In a way similar to what is happening in Aries, planetary alignments in one sign cast a distinct theme that is spreading out into all of society. And this is describing something you must not let get to you: a mentality of hunker-down desperation. You have been through very nearly everything, and you have many reasons to be confident in yourself. However, there are a few things that could easily erode the quality of your character. One of them is alcohol. One bad decision influenced by a little C2H5OH (ethanol) could cost you a lot; it would be like slipping on a wet floor. Think things through from many viewpoints and be cautious of what you consider when your defenses

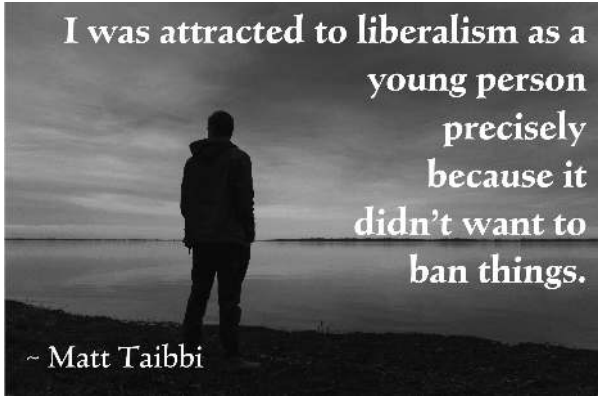
are down. Another is deciding the world is past any notion of right or wrong. There are always jobs for people who have suspended ethics and morality-remember, it's not about what they do, it's about what you do. You want to be a point of gathering, the open home, the open mind, the tribal elder, the ancient shaman. That requires humility and a spirit of service. You are an agent of the cosmos.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 19)

Pluto in your birth sign, which lasts until 2043, will give you powers that you have not yet realized you have. You may have had a little taste of them over the summer, but it was a weird time and many people were feeling disoriented. (Why was this? A torrent of A.I. propaganda, doomsaying, and the sense of a bottomless pit opening up shook everyone.) However, you will start to get a sense of your nascent power once Saturn, Uranus and Neptune change signs, plus Jupiter a little later in the year. All of these planets will pick up on and amplify the power of Pluto, giving it many modes of expression. These will influence your mental process, your creativity and risk-taking, and your concrete sense of who you are. You may wake up one day and it feels like everything has engaged. And the way the planets align, the one thing missing is a sense of responsibility. The houses where these transits take place can only be governed by oneself; there is no sense of an external conscience. But then all of a sudden Chiron will enter Taurus. That represents conscience, accountability and a deep sense of responsibility. You can and you will be held to higher standards, and I suggest you impose them on yourself immediately. Then, you can have quite a lot of fun with such blazing creativity that comes your way.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)

Saturn and Neptune are still in your sign, though soon to move on to Aries in a few months. This is a very important time that is about endings, resolution of longstanding issues, and making peace with who you are. These placements-which have gone on for a long time, as Neptune arrived in Pisces in 2011-are easy to take for granted now, but you will miss them when they are gone. Meanwhile, the top of your chart, fire sign Sagittarius, is thundering at the moment. It is urging you to make some bold professional moves and to proceed with confidence and commitment in everything that you do. You are aided and abetted by Jupiter in your house of risk and gambling, which also happens to be about having fun. No matter how much you want to work toward tangible goals, you will bring your aspirations closer with free-swim type of creative play. You are a water sign and you must flow in order to live. Affirm your own intentions and desires, and be truly positive with the people around you.



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Poems From “Grief Age Love”

We continue to feature poems from Grief Age Love, the new anthology written by over 30 Vashon poets, and edited by Jeanie Okimoto.

Loop Editor’s note: We meant to include the following poem by Lynn Carrigan in our November issue, and feel it is just as rich in December! Enjoy.

Mid-November

In front of a warm cedar house
In leaf-dropping woods by the sea
Head high atop a wizening stalk
One last sunflower transmits
Its beacon-yellow message

Under the dissolving rain of fall
Above a radio tower below
It blinks back a signal of its own
Its broadcast insistent: I remain!

I am here, it calls, I am still here!
I will self-seed my own renewal
for a future I cannot see

Remember me and wish me safe
Passage through this long winter

I will not be as I am now

~ Lynn Carrigan

A longtime lover of literacy, Lynn likes languages, letters, libraries, locals, luggage, and sometimes lying.

Island poetry in these pages

How about yours?



Submit your poems to The Vashon Loop!

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Forest of My Heart

A winter prayer and proclamation

Lantern in the darkwood
Shine on the wolves!
Rouse them from the long spell and the slumber of the snows.

Your campfire burns
in every one of my cells.
Wake us, O Lord, into holiness.

In the briar’s nest
the dragon yields
and the elves put down their bows
Surrender, my heart,
Surrender again!

We assume our proper stance
In honest praise of
You.

Amen!
~ Jane Valencia

All my life I’ve loved, written, and shared tales of magic. Do such stories have a place in a Christ-life? One day in the woods, I asked that question.

the wave

There is a wave

that tempers the world

There is number and season

rhythm for stride

There are those ducks

afloat even in winters

that hold their chill

at any distance.

And here is a mist no eye can dispel

no eye to number the wave of days

or dot the horizon longer and higher

than those floating ducks

where time comes in waves

of no beginning or end.

~ Claudia Hollander-Lucas

Claudia Hollander-Lucas is a visual artist, writer, book-maker, and long-time Islander whose artwork can be found near and far in public and private collections. Visit her website and press called We Live In The Woods for details: claudiahollander-lucas.com



Illustration by Jane Valencia



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Resurrected Santa. Photo by Claudia Hollander-Lucas

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News You May Have Missed



- Under-40s are losing memory performance
- Bitcoin owners being kidnapped and robbed
- Brits think headlights are too bright, too

Read the full stories: vashonloop.com/missed/

I am not good at noticing when I'm happy, except in retrospect.



~ Tana French