

THE LOOP



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SERVING VASHON AND ITS NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES ~ FREE

January 7, 2026

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Thanks, Uncle Sam

By Michael Shook

With the holidays a memory, the New Year upon us, and the light returning, the days are ripe with all manner of possibility. The resolute among us are excited to enact their resolutions. I wish them all success. No resolution for me, since I resolved to give up resolutions some time ago (it's working well).

What I am excited about is celebrating the nation's 250th birthday - HUZZAH! I was happy to party along at the 200th, but then I was a callow youth, too young to grasp ... ah well, many things. The national birthday was a revel to me, a grand one, but not much else. Now, age has brought with it a deep appreciation and heartfelt gratitude for the country I'm fortunate enough to call my own.

When I consider what the Founders initiated, my mind boggles. Their collective achievements were unprecedented. Imagine the audacity, the courage, the determination and vision, coupled with Herculean labors, required to create the country, all of it aided by a confluence of fortuitous events.

What is taken for granted now was then, for most people, simply unimaginable. And yet ... imagine laws agreed upon by the citizens instead of being handed down from on high by

a king. Imagine further that the citizens would have a panoply of legal rights simply by virtue of being citizens: the right to own property, the right to worship freely (or not at all), the right to vote in (or vote out!) elected representatives, the presumption of innocence and the right to a trial by peers.

Imagine having freedom of movement, to go where one wishes, when one wishes. Imagine the right to privacy, and the freedom to speak one's mind. All of which in toto is the recognition that the individual is of value in and of himself, that one is not a thing, a marionette made to dance in whatever way a ruler wishes. Moreover, natural law inheres to us, and so we are fit to govern ourselves by reason of our reason. Thus, the Founders could confidently say, as we can also:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Of course, it can be hard to appreciate the things given us, since it is simply the water we



swim in. And the political vagaries of today, if attended to, constitute a noisy distraction from contemplating the riches bequeathed unto us.

Continued on Page 2



Deep Space Rendezvous, Part 2

By Mike Curtin

My article last November discussed 3I/ATLAS - what it was made of, where it traveled from, and ways it behaved differently than other comets we have seen.

Some people say 3I/ATLAS is a ship, or even a consciousness, come to observe us here on earth as we make a major transition. 3I/ATLAS made its closest approach to Earth on December 19, 2025, and then turned back towards the depths of interstellar space. But maybe not without leaving us with something.

Visualize this. As 3I/ATLAS moved through our solar system, it was surrounded by a high-energy, high-frequency plasma field. Plasma is the fourth state of matter as we know it (alongside solids, liquids, and gases). Some people talk about plasma as being not just a physical medium, but as

something more closely related to consciousness - able to carry energy and information in ways we're still trying to understand.

It is also speculated that, through plasma interactions, and as part of its journey, 3I/ATLAS and the Sun delivered energy and information into the solar system, and into us. Think of this as "seeds" planted that may take time to fully grow. Now that 3I/ATLAS has completed its inward swing and is on its way back to parts unknown, all we can really do is wait and see what comes.

Once you accept the idea that things can come here from outside our solar system, it raises questions about who else might be out there, and what their relationship to us could be. For me, the idea of extraterrestrial life isn't one thing - it's many things. I don't think of "aliens" as a single group with a single intention. From everything I've read and listened to, there seem to be many different kinds of beings, at different levels of development, with different relationships to consciousness, matter, and time. Some are described as very physical, others much less so. Some are said to look almost exactly like us, while others don't.

A lot of this information comes from channelers like Edgar Cayce and Bashar, along with other traditions that describe reality as layered rather than linear. The idea is that consciousness exists across densities or levels, and what we experience as physical reality is just one part of something much bigger.

In that framework, these beings don't necessarily "travel" through space the way we imagine, because they're not limited to the same physical constraints we are. For us, the speed of light marks the limit of the physical reality we experience - the 3 dimensions of space bound up with time. If other beings exist at higher dimensions - the 4th, 5th, and even beyond - that limit would not apply to them in the same way. By



Continued on Page 12



Your License Plate, Your Rap Sheet:

Vashon Enters the Surveillance Age
By Marc J. Elzenbeck

Imagine you're a county or municipal administrator in a cash-hungry jurisdiction and you see a demo of an Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) system. These are typically "green" solar-powered cameras mounted along high-traffic public thoroughfares to capture vehicle images, license plates, make, model, color, and designated characteristics.

The sales rep reels off a list of compelling benefits: painless installation and integration with local and national databases; 24/7 crime deterrence, and proven rates of reduction; improved traffic safety; quicker arrests and property recovery; full customer data ownership; custom configuration; cloud-based storage; and only deployed where there's no legal expectation of privacy.

The pitch might come from a vendor like Flock or Axon, leaders in the digital surveillance and evidence management fields. Honestly, it would be

Continued on Page 3

Your License Plate, Your Rap Sheet

Continued from Front Page

hard not to sit there and think, "Hoo-Doggies! We could open up a whole new revenue stream here in Mayberry with just a few of these babies!" Admittedly, it's a target-rich environment. According to the Insurance Research Council's latest report, about 1 in 7 United States vehicles (15.4%) drove without insurance in 2023. Here in Washington State, CARFAX figures that 593,000 non-commercial vehicles, about 10%, currently drive with expired registrations.

With the ALPR cameras, you'll see everything from a hawk-like perspective, a searchable, zoomable panopticon for not just outstanding warrants, but past infractions, accidents, complaints, judgments, changes in address, passengers, Amber Alerts, weight, credit scores, hair color, turn signals, fender dents, and political affiliations.

Passively, you could hook the camera system up to a printer, send out infraction notices and watch the moolah role on in. If the lawbreakers contest or don't pay, you can just tack on higher penalties or send in the debt collectors. Actively, you could set filters to alert local law enforcement to criminals who've gone unnoticed.

Are flock cameras being considered for installation on Vashon? What law-abiding Islander wouldn't want this? Well. There are some slight problems. I started



building automated or "AI" systems in my early twenties, for languages, trading, predictive risk, and financial and actuarial applications. Even when proficient, all systems have gaps and flaws stemming from technical and human factors, as follows:

1. Recognition and transaction processing systems are at best sandcastles, eroded or washed away by unpredictable tides of change.

2. They're also a paradox - the better the system you build, and the more temporarily enriched users rely on it, the more severe the consequences become when it's wrong.

3. Schemes can be tricked. Motivated humans facing them interact, observe, and adapt.

4. They over-promise cost savings by ignoring the importance of corner case errors.

Starting small, how many of us have gotten false toll bills? I have. Rain, sun glint, dirty plates, covers, these all drive error rates up. The toll tech is very good, equal to or better than Flock and Axon cameras.

Firefighter's Lasagne

By Caitlin Rothermel

My Uncle Mike lived in Breezy Point, New York. It was a sandy, lovely beach town, and during the summers and holidays, my family would visit his. Sometimes, Uncle Mike would cook lasagna.

He didn't just cook for us. Mike was a New York City firefighter, and I got to watch him prepare lasagna for his company. Layer-by-layer, he taught me some basic rules for a lasagna to be proud of, and to feed a very hungry team. Cooking for your team was, and is, a firefighter thing; with the long workdays, it's efficient - and also, camaraderie.

I knew my uncle's lasagna was special. Great flavor, of course, but also substance, texture, and a deep sense of satisfaction. Mike didn't skimp on ingredients, and so his final layers weren't slippery from a lack of filling. His lasagna held together, like cake.

I started making lasagna myself as a young adult when I realized it was just about the best group dish ever. I've become kind of a student of lasagna.

And, like most students, I learned first by making mistakes. The most common is watery lasagna. Maybe I didn't drain the meat, used cheese that was too wet, or neglected to let the final dish stand a while after removing it from the oven. Watery lasagna can happen to the best of us, so I try to think of ways to remove excess water as I go.

Another common miss is not

adding enough sauce, which makes the lasagna dry. Or adding too much sauce or using a sauce that is too thin - both of which make the lasagna watery. You want a thicker sauce, and a good amount of it, applied strategically.

For me, an ideal lasagna dish is 9" x 13" and at least 3" deep.

About lasagna noodles. It's a sad fact of life that, to make a decent family size lasagna, you actually need more than one box of noodles, but way less than two boxes. This is a problem with almost all brands. Ideally, buy lasagna noodles at least 3 boxes at a time.

Also, any type of noodle is probably fine if you plan to eat all your lasagna right away, but special consideration is needed for leftovers. When reheated, normal noodles become soft and mushy. There is a solution - rice pasta lasagna noodles. They remain firm and a bit chewy even if you microwave them. I also think they taste better than wheat noodles in lasagna. They are available online, at Thriftway, and are worth buying in bulk.

One last note: You can add vegetables, but they will always make your lasagna more watery. Spinach or other greens are the best option. Whether fresh or frozen, cook first and drain/squeeze out as much water as possible before layering. For other vegetables, sauté or roast first and allow them to drain or dry on a clean dishtowel as needed.

But getting bigger, what if I want to avoid a toll, or go joy-riding around the Island spray-painting memes onto businesses? No problem. Simply alter the license plate. Or switch it out, preferably with a vehicle of the same make and color. I could steal a truck from off-Island, knock over an ATM, and be gone.

Probably best to stop that line of thinking. And move on from there to the temptation for surveillance abuse. What if someone sees an opportunity for blackmail, or ICE starts offering \$10,000 rewards? Regardless of encryption, permissions, or licenses, there's no substitute for solid law enforcement and human nature remains the weakest link in secure systems.

The municipalities that have rolled out these panopti-cams report mixed results, and some have been very disappointed in terms of financial and social rewards.

At their next meeting on January 15th, the Vashon-Maury Community Council will discuss Flock cameras. To them we'll extend a "thank you" in advance, and ask, remember when Kurt Lysen was the Sheriff in this town? He had a bumper sticker on the back of his cruiser that said: "At Least I'm in Front of You."

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



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Thank You!

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Firefighter's Lasagna

Ingredients

- Rice lasagna noodles, 2 packages (about 1.25 packages for a family dish)
- Mozzarella cheese, at least 2 lbs*
- Whole milk ricotta (part-skim is too watery), 0.5 or 1 quart (to your taste)
- Freshly grated firm cheese (e.g., parmesan, romano), 1-3 cups (to your taste)
- 1-2 lbs ground beef or other meat (optional)
- Sauce (about 36 ounces, or ~1.5 large jars)
- Your preferred spices (I use Penzey's Pizza Seasoning)
- Salt and a little olive oil



* Ideally, use a mozzarella log for at least some; drain excess water by wrapping it in a clean dishtowel for a few hours ahead of cooking.

Directions

Cook the meat with salt and your preferred spices; remove from heat while it is still rare. Drain or use a slotted spoon to transfer the meat.

Boil a large pot of salted water and cook lasagna noodles until they are bendable but not soft. Drain the noodles and rinse immediately with cold water.

Prepare the lasagna dish by lightly coating it with olive oil (a little goes a long way); preheat oven to 350°.

Boil a large pot of salted water. Cook noodles al dente (they should still be just a little stiff), usually about 7 minutes.

Layer the first set of noodles on the bottom of the pan, then layer the other ingredients, keeping in mind to alternate wetter and drier elements. I use this pattern: Layer 1: meat, mozzarella, sauce, one layer of noodles; Layer 2: ricotta, grated firm cheese, sauce, noodles; Layer 3: mozzarella, sauce, noodles; Layer 4: Sauce and grated firm cheese; sprinkle with oregano or other spices if you wish.

Don't hold back with the ingredients, but don't overflow your dish, either.

Cook 45-50 minutes. Cover while cooking if you want but uncover for at least the last 15-20 minutes to let moisture evaporate. If your lasagna sounds like it is bubbling inside, it is done.

After removing lasagna from the oven, it's critical to let it rest for 20-30 minutes before eating.



After Surgery, I Am Now Metal Mom

By Pam "Gates" Johnson

Well, I made it to the other side of surgery. About 4 weeks post and to say it has been a challenge is an understatement. Let me walk you through the last few weeks.

My surgery was scheduled for 7:30 a.m. December 8th. Had to be at the hospital at 5:30 am, so my daughter and I decided it made more sense to get a hotel room. We reserved a room at the Best Western near SeaTac. It is about ten minutes from my hospital. Had to do the special antibacterial shower the night before and the morning of, no food or drink, blah blah blah. Too much stuff to do in addition to the ferry. It was a good thing to get the hotel room.

My daughter and I don't spend much time running around SeaTac. She lives in Chehalis, so when she flies, she leaves out of Portland. That being said, we are not familiar with the SeaTac layout. We managed to get on the main road leading into the airport, but couldn't figure out how to get to the hotel.

Of course, we goofed and ended up at the six-lanes arrival place. As we crept through the car maze, we saw the sign directing us to where we wanted to go. Of course, the lane we wanted was about four jam-packed lanes over, and we ended up back on the road we came in on. Had to find a way to turn around, guess what lane we needed, and try again. The second time we were successful and found the hotel.

I still had a small window of being able to eat and I just wanted some egg drop soup. Daughter found a place near us, so off she went. The restaurant was supposed to be about five minutes away. She was gone for about 45 minutes. Turns out the restaurant was inside the airport. She searched around and finally ended up at the food court in South Center Mall. Of course, no egg drop



I Have Questions, Part Two

The Holiday Addition

By Dave B.

I realize this is now January and I should have created this for the December issue of The Loop, but maybe we could pose these questions for the New Year and decide if we even have answers for the below silliness.

After all, the holidays can be trying and difficult for some, so laughter might be needed. I hope this is worthy. Here goes ...

Who created the Vashon Candy Canes and why would they build a double one? Did Krampus work on this project so that they would live forever as a joke? Should they be returned to Santa's Workshop so they could be repaired repeatedly, or just finally pass away into the recycling center? (Thank you to the Elves at the Eagles who fix these every year.)

What person or persons said it was OK to serve alcohol on the ferry to people who will DRIVE off the ferry and into town? And if that is OK, can we have rumnogg please?

What is rumnogg? I think you can guess that one!

From November 15th to January 1st, can we rename the ferries for the eight reindeer? I would love to get picked up on the Southend by Blitzen or Dasher. Maybe we could make up some cool names for the various ferry routes that would make sense for where they service. Any ideas? Definitely NOT Comet for the Northend - no way!

Island Voices

soup. She got me something, but I don't remember what.

The next morning, we got to the hospital, checked in, and waited to be called. My memory is a little fuzzy, but I recall a bunch of people coming in and out, taking vitals, asking questions and starting an IV. My hand veins are squiggly and can be a pain to get an IV started. The first one went in relatively easily, then the nurse said she needed to put one in my other hand, too. What? About that time, the anesthesiologist came in. Turns out, the second IV could be put in after I was asleep, so that's what we did.

The surgery took over five hours. I came out with about a ten-inch incision and eight pieces of metal in my back: a rod, bolts, screws, and who knows what else. I had no idea my back was so screwed up. If I ever have to go through security at an airport, the alarms will go off like a siren.

I will skip all the hospital stuff. They kept me there for two nights. Had me on my feet the first night. It wasn't painful because I was whacked out on goofballs. The one interesting thing that happened was the drain on my incision came loose. I felt something wet on my chest, reached down, and came up with a handful of blood. Dripping down my gown and into my hair.

I couldn't find the nurse call button, so I started yelling, "Help! I'm bleeding!" The hospital was understaffed, so it took a few minutes to get someone in there to figure out what was going on. By then, my hair and gown were soaked. They ripped the gown off and wiped my hair a little, gave me a new gown, and that was that. My hair was still bloody.

I got home a couple of days later. There were a few hiccups and one 911 call, but now it's all going

well. My doctor says I am doing good. My physical therapist says I am doing well. My daughter stayed for two weeks, but I'm on my own now. It's been a learning experience. The three big rules are: 1. don't bend, 2. don't twist, and 3. don't lift anything over five pounds. Try getting into a bed or a car without twisting. Not easy.

Anyway, I am getting better. Still housebound, so I have to rely on the generosity of friends, who have stepped up and really helped me out. The holidays were weird, but managed to get through them. I was lamenting the fact I had no Christmas tree, so a good friend brought me a little 4-footer to put on my front-room table. That cheered me up. Two good friends came over and wrapped the Christmas presents I ordered online. My Vashon kids had Christmas dinner here with me. My Chehalis kids are coming up soon.

I see the doctor on February 2nd and hopefully he will tell me I can go back to the pool. Until then, I am sitting here watching TV, dealing with bouts of self-pity and tears, and knitting a little. I am so thankful for my family and all my good friends who stop by to cheer me up and bring me goodies to eat.

Doc says it will take a full year to heal. One month down, eleven to go. I can do this.



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on Vashon? Do we have to worry about an ICE raid? Should we make arrangements if Santa's immigrant status is in question? He is from the North Pole. Does he need a green card one day a year?

Is Santa required to carry sleigh insurance? If so, does he use the Geico Gecko or Doug and Limo Imo? What is his deductible? Does he need theft insurance while he is in your house? If on the road he needs some quick cash, does he use OCCU, US Bank, Chase, or PSCCU?

Speaking of which, what libation does Santa enjoy after 50 million miles in a sleigh? Hot or cold, ice or none? Does he like pepperoni smores? Will Rudolf be joining him?

Why eight reindeer? Is it based on the gravity and weight ratio it would

take to lift all those gifts into the sky? Was Steven Hawking consulted on this? What mad person named all twelve of them anyway? If you ask me, they could have done a better job ... Cheech and Chong did!

I could go on and on, but it is now midnight, with the rumnogg wearing off, and the rain is making me tired. I have many more for next year so stay off my naughty list, or should we go there? Up to you.

Yes, I could have Googled all of these and had answers that might make sense, but where is the fun in that? YOU can Google the answers if you so desire (if there really are answers ... LOL).

Happy Holidays all. Enjoy the holiday pizza and any nogg you wish!





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Where Have All the Grammas Gone?

By Suzanna Leigh

We called her Gramma Stoltz. She lived in a one-bedroom trailer across the road from her son's auto wrecking yard and the big house on Cemetery Road where she had raised her children. Here, she tended her quarter-acre garden and a passel of chickens.

She was eighty when I worked for her, and used a wheelchair - but not in the usual way.

Lydia Stoltz would be sitting in her wheelchair when I arrived. If it was still a little chilly out, she had on several skirts for warmth and an old sweater with holes. There would be a pot of oats cooking on the stove, for her chickens. If one of her hens had escaped the pen and met its demise on the road, she added her to the pot as well. That's when I lost all respect for chickens, the cannibals!

Under Gramma's direction, I lifted the pot off the stove and set it on the seat of the wheelchair as she stood behind it. I grabbed a bag of chicken feed from under the couch and put that beside the pot, along with the seed we would be planting that day. Her hoe stood beside the door, and that we laid across the arm rests. Then, Gramma Stoltz pushed the wheelchair out the door, past the apple tree that grew from an apple core she planted years ago, and down the walk to the chicken coop.

After feeding the chickens, we headed for the garden, freshly tilled



Gramma Stoltz -
Illustration by Suzanna Leigh

by her neighbor, Mr. Mann. As I poked holes in the soft earth with my finger, Gramma dropped a corn kernel in each hole and covered it over with her hoe - which served both as a crutch and a gardening tool.

After a couple of hours work, we headed inside for a lunch of canned peaches, cottage cheese, and salad. As we ate, she told me of her life.

Lydia Stoltz came to America from Germany in the early 1900s, as a child. I think she was raised on the old Zarth farm, on 115th Avenue near the Catholic Church. She showed me a photo of a strawberry field in front of that house, where she and friends

would have strawberry fights while picking berries. After she married, she and her husband raised vegetables and took them by boat to the Pike Place Market to sell. It was there she broke her back and that was why she had the wheelchair - or so I assumed.

She told me with pride how she planted gooseberries against her husband's wishes. "He liked his beer and never went to the far end of the garden, so I planted them there," she told me. "They sold quite well!" Apparently, if they were illegal then (because they hosted white pine blister rust), no one told her.

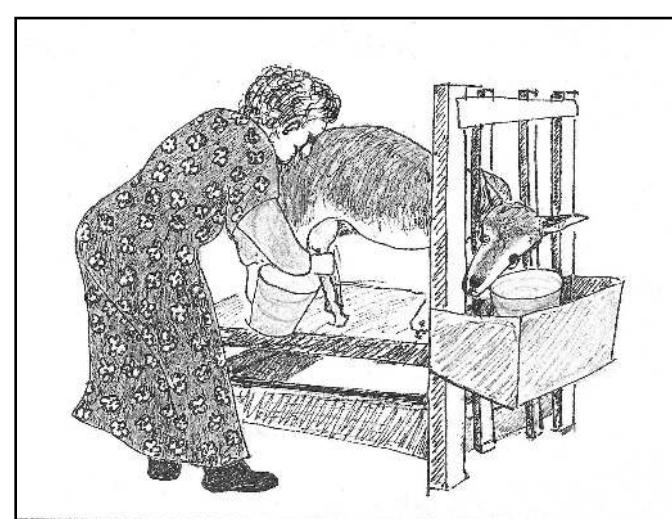
One day, we went in Lady Bug, my little black Karmen Ghia, to have lunch with Gramma Stoltz's friend, Granny Morgan.

Granny Morgan - I think her name was Ida May - had pygmy goats along with her milking goats. When I went to wash my hands in the bathroom, Granny cautioned me to be careful of the baby pygmy goat she

was raising there. We lunched on chicken noodle soup, with her wide flat homemade noodles. In short, she was living a life I aspired to. Like many in my generation, I wanted to live closer to the land, have goats, and do everything by from scratch - perhaps what today we are calling "slow living." We called it "going back to the land."

I learned some things about gardening from Gramma Stoltz, but I never caught the gardening bug. Now I am nearing 80, and wonder if I have learned the lessons she and Granny Morgan taught me. Remembering Gramma Stoltz's wheelchair/wheelbarrow, and the baby goat in Granny Morgan's bathroom, I think I learned to use what I have in unusual ways, whatever does the job.

I'm not sure I learned Gramma Stoltz's perseverance though, as she continued to work in her garden even with a broken back.



Granny Morgan
Milking Lollipop -
Illustration by
Suzanna Leigh



A New Life, A New Year Embracing Forgiveness

By Daniel Hooker

On June 8th 1972, a young girl ran screaming in agony, her body engulfed in flames by bombs dropped full of napalm. The world would be forever changed by the Pulitzer Prize photograph of this. It was one of many horrific instances created by the insanity we call war. The young girl's name is Phan Thị Kim Phúc.

Her body had been completely burned. She had nerve-ending issues throughout her life and problems with arthritis. Kim Phúc overcame the pain of her past to actually create peace within herself and others. Letting go of that pain, suffering, and torture that her people and family went through, and herself - that is true forgiveness. She later became an ambassador of peace and reconciliation.

Between Vietnamese soldiers and Americans, Kim Phúc would create a safe place for both sides, by inviting them to exchange life as it really is. She did this by bringing them together to share the normalcy of daily home life. Many American veterans would make this journey to Vietnam and it would change them, and their perspectives of life itself.

One such man was a friend of mine, Richard Smith. He stayed with a famous general and his family as an honored guest. Richard was just a corpsman aboard a Navy vessel - not high-ranking. Yet, he was accepted not only as a guest, but as family. Experiencing the kindness of a once-feared opponent, he discovered that the Vietnamese were tight-woven families just like us. There wasn't anything really to fear, just to embrace in the commonality of being human. When he was embraced as part of the family, forgiveness sprouted from his soul, and he discovered who the Vietnamese really are.

How do we get so conditioned that we forget each other's humanity? Kim Phúc shows us we're just human. We can sit and have a meal and laugh and cry together. And share all those emotions that humans have, and walk away from the table, satiated.

In 2008 on National Public Radio, Khim Phúc read an essay she wrote called "The Long Road to Forgiveness."

"Forgiveness made me free from hatred. I still have many scars on my body and severe pain most days but my heart is cleansed. Napalm is very powerful, but faith, forgiveness, and love are much more powerful. We would not have war at all if everyone could learn how to live with true love, hope, and forgiveness. If that little girl in the picture can do it, ask yourself: Can you?"

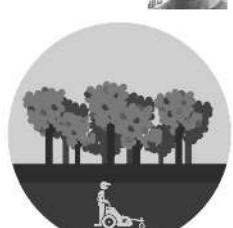
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Moss at my side, foraging along forest paths, the smell of damp PNW air filling my lungs - this is what settles my soul, ties me to the land, and brings me back to myself.

- Lyndsey Braun-Palmer

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Nothing Says "New" Like 1960

By Richard Odell

I've always associated the 1940s with the color blue. Why, I don't know. The 1930s I've seen always as dull green. Picture books, maybe, dated objects, impressed indelibly the child's perception.

That I associate the 1950s with black and white seems obvious enough, for the greater world first came to this child's eyes through the half-tones of television, and I would soon enough learn that beyond the waters from our green Island was a city personified by men who indeed wore suits of gray or black and worked in gray buildings.

But why, again, do I picture 1961 as yellow, or rather, the pastels of Easter? 1962 I see simply as bright and open, like the sky being shot through by John Glenn and the new Space Needle, for I was a Pacific Northwest boy, and loved the Gold Cup hydroplanes. 1963 is forever in the rain of November 23rd, with downcast boughs of evergreen.

Yet perception, itself, changed with time. Up until age three or four, a simple object could fascinate, demanding nothing. Things simply were. The world lay yet beyond. One was enclosed by things. Shadows lay in the folds. There was always a warm, larger body nearby.

At four or five, worldly order began to assert itself. The adults stood back and left you on your own in the thing called kindergarten. Divisions had formed. Vashon's kindergarten, today the low slung green building at the crossroads at Center, was divided into two classrooms, a pattern that would hold for both Vashon and Burton students all the way through eighth grade. Adult expectations, not of parents, but of strangers, began inexplicably to assert themselves, and with them the apple of knowledge. Most unexpectedly, failure entered the world.

Even so, some sense of enclosure, those dark folds of comfort, would yet abide. The ceiling of the kindergarten was low, fluorescent lights had yet to be forced upon us, the floor was dark with varnish; a simple object could yet enthrall. What lay beyond

remained closed off by the marker of 1959.

Then something happened, and the world became suddenly spacious and bright, and although I had been on the planet for a number of years, everything seemed suddenly new. Everything had a "first time" quality. It was not merely that certain things truly were happening for the first time - first printed word explained, first one plus one - but I was especially aware that this, and this, and this, were first-times, as such.

Questions were raised. Answers were given and accepted. I settled in for the ride. Other first times would occur as life stretched out, but aside from certain rites of passage, many of these firsts would have a certain, "What now?" quality to them.

In 1960, we had a new president. "Let the word go forth. The torch has been passed to a new generation." His name would soon be on a plaque at the town's new post office. I had a new classroom, in a school which was nearly new itself.

Our town had a new Kimmel's. The dimly lit Kimmel's corner market in the village, with its crowded little windows, closed its doors one evening in '59, and the next morning opened them onto a bright, spacious pavilion on the west edge of town. A supermarket, flooded with morning sunlight, incorporating the independent Lloyd's Bakery, a merciless seducer that could bend your knees with the scent of fresh bread and doughnuts the moment you came through those wondrously modern, automated doors.

There were fifty feet of packaged meats, an entire corner given over to magazines and books, aisle after brightly lit aisle of household goods, and above it all, a sprawling mural of comestibles and domestic goodness in the ellipsoid line graphics in fashion at the time.

Still, one thing about Kimmel's remained unchanged - and would remain so a long while. Hattie, a vigorous Japanese lady who ran the floor in the old place, and who I remember for having once pinched my cheek as I sat in a shopping cart,

went along with the transfer.

I found her still there, outlasting the original owners, 30 years later; fast-idling and quiet, she seemed the type that could master the life-long routine. She loved to work. At age 34, I had made it home in time to see her off to retirement, a stranger though I may have been to her by then.

We had new roads. Yes, there were roads yet to build, in those years. Even the giant, sea-serpent head of a Cross-Sound Bridge would soon rise to threaten us all; the first of such monster sightings, and my father would play a small but very public role in sending it to hell. Still, the boom times transforming Greater Seattle and the eastside environs could be felt like shock waves on the Island no one elsewhere kept in mind.

Bainbridge was, in reputation, more the bedroom community than Vashon. We never made the papers, but by word of mouth we grew, and the boom-time whip-hand of "Faster, faster," compelled the county to straighten the main highway in two places along the Northend. A little cluster of homes, along with The Beauty Nook Salon, were relieved of the burgeoning ferry traffic, and Scales Corner, on which my father once flipped the '55 Ford, was left to scrub willow and salmonberries.

Yet, before all this, there first came the widening of the uphill climb from the Northend ferry, such that giant hauls and slower cars could bear right and let the faster traffic flow. The builders of this second lane needed a nice, level clearing where they could pile their stash of gravel, and a roadside spot near our house was really the only place available.

They approached my father. He cut a deal. Pave my driveway, he told them, and you can pile your gravel as you please. No child could forget the sight of a steamroller in his own driveway, the smoking hot asphalt going under the steel juggernaut. Now my family, too, had a new road. And the roadbuilders piled their gravel high in their chosen spot, never knowing my father didn't actually own that particular piece of ground.

And the children played King of the Hill.

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"Just Throw Me in the Ground"

... or Reflections on Last Wishes

By Jane Valencia

Larkspur Conservation Cemetery, Taylor Hollow, TN. Gravestone - photo by Jane Valencia

Last year our family researched the possibility of home burial - you know, where, if you have land, you can bury your family the old-fashioned way. Dig a deep hole in the ground and lay your loved one in. Home burials, however, are not currently permitted in Washington. HB 1065, which seeks to allow family burial grounds on certain types of private property, continues to appear in legislation. It also continues to stall.

If you wish a home burial, you'll need to move to a state that permits it, although you'll want to carefully research what state and local restrictions may be in play. These often have to do with distance from property lines and water sources, and may have other requirements.

For natural burial on the Island, Vashon Cemetery has a green burial section. Some more information is provided in the accompanying sidebar.

In researching natural or "green" burial and cemeteries, I discovered a variation on the concept. Have you heard of "conservation cemeteries"? We hadn't either. But on our trip to Tennessee in early August, we visited one called Larkspur Conservation, tucked away in Taylor Hollow out in the hills north of Nashville.

Larkspur is both a nature preserve and natural burial ground, with the conservation cemetery aim to ecologically restore and preserve the land. A conservation easement held by an independent, accredited conservation organization protects the land from ever being sold for development. In essence, the burials safeguard the preserve.

As with green burials, one's body is laid into the ground, with only biodegradable caskets, clothing, and other items involved. In green burial grounds, gravestones are often of native stone, and plantings (once the land has settled, about a year later) are limited to a few native plants. Ornaments and decorations are usually restricted or not permitted. In a conservation cemetery, the site itself is actively part of the ecological restoration, meant to become one with the earth.

During a burial at Larkspur, family and friends process with the deceased up the broad woodland path to the chosen site. The hole is ready and layered within with flower petals and pine needles. The loved one - lying in a simple softwood casket or swaddled in a cloth shroud - is lowered by ropes, often by family members themselves under the guidance of Larkspur staff. A ceremony takes place, and each attendee has the opportunity to place a handful or shovelful of earth or a flower within as they offer a last good bye. Then, participants are welcome to return the soil to the grave, and then to place pine needles and cut flowers on the resulting mound. Sometimes family and friends sprinkle native flower seeds atop.



Gravesite at Larkspur Conservation Cemetery

Over time, the mound breaks down and becomes part of the meadow.

All graves are marked with a metal disc with the name and death year inscribed upon it, and contain a GPS coordinate. One can also include a modest-sized native stone inscribed with the full name and birth and death dates. There is no room for other inscription.

For this type of burial to be a good match, the family and yourself (when alive), must be at peace with the reality that we don't physically last forever. Loved ones can visit you indeed (the GPS coordinate helps them find you), but they will not be setting up a bench for you or special ornaments, or cultivating your plot in a certain way. They will, however, experience the beauty and blessing of continuing life and the promises inherent in that.

At least that's what I experienced when I wandered one of the meadows on that sweltering August day. Our family had arrived at Taylor Hollow, viewed information postings about the native plants, trees, birds, the ecological restoration underway, and about the grave sites and conservation cemetery (plus a post offering information about tick safety). We walked up the dirt road amidst the woods, and experienced the quiet of this very much off-the-beaten-track preserve. Birds sang, insects hummed or buzzed. I continued on to the meadow, and began to find the grave sites. They lay intermingled with incredible wildflowers in bloom, including one of my favorites, passion flower (they look like little alien spacecrafts). It is true (I imagine) that in time the meadow will turn into a woodland, and these flowers too will pass.



Passion Flower



But the beauty and life in such a place are hymns of eternity, and promises of that. For me in this moment, I see no need for my grave site to exist as a monument to withstand the centuries. Still, I would love for someone to cultivate a wee medicinal herb patch upon it, leaving space for candles and such, as loved ones might care to place. To be nestled in God's creation as I await the second coming - that notion is music and balm to my soul.

Dress me in my baptismal gown and rest me in a wicker casket of willow and seagrass, or a simple one of pine. Drape a burial shroud upon me and place a cross in my hands and the icon of my patron saint at my side. Lay me in the ground facing east, an east-facing cross before me, and beside the place where my husband in his time will rest. May there be cedar fronds and gathered flowers and aromatic herbs to layer in or scatter as inspired.

Weave me in a last tapestry of prayer, and a song or two - yours or the birds', and toss in a handful of earth. If grace allows, I'll continue within the river of leave-taking that begins with the separation of soul from body, flows through the first days of vigil and liturgy, and is blessed like stars in the succession of future memorials.

No, don't "just throw me in the ground." But the ground indeed can help hallow me, becoming a cradle in the passage, a boat to new life. One in which, God willing, we meet again within the joy of the saints and angels.

Find Out More:

Green Burial - www.orderofthegooddeath.com

Larkspur Conservation - larkspurconservation.org



GPS Marker at Larkspur Conservation Cemetery

Green Burial with the Vashon Cemetery

In March 2023, The Loop published an article, "Vashon Cemetery's First Green Burial" by March Twisdale (read it on vashonloop.com). Since then, the Vashon Cemetery's Greenwood Natural Burial section has sold out, and has a wait list.

The Vashon Cemetery District in partnership with the Vashon-Maury Land Trust, hopes to acquire more land for natural burial in the future. They are seeking properties that are non-wetland and have reasonable access.

If you have property you wish to donate or sell, please contact:

Lisa Devereaux, Vashon Cemetery Manager, lisa@mohlerfuneralhomes.com or 206-463-9300, or the Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust, info@vashonlandtrust.org, (206) 463-2644.

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Gravity Is No Longer Our Friend

By Seán Malone and John Sweetman

"Can you bring down my groceries from the Toyota?" Seán asked as I stopped by to visit. The path to Seán's cabin is all uphill or downhill, depending upon one's direction. I dragged a few bags out of the back of his pickup and brought them down the path steps and into his comfortable cabin.

"How come this gallon of cider seems heavier?" I asked. Seán responded, "Well now everything seems heavier. You are the physicist, so explain this!"

And this led to a discussion of how gravity seems to pick on we older folks.

In our younger days, Seán and I were able to use "gravity" to our advantage. We both felled timber and learned:

"Don't fell and load firewood from the downside of a road."

"Don't shoot a deer from the 100 yards above the steep bank of a road."

Practical things.

Well, we grew older and "practical" things became, "Get down from that ladder and stay offa the roof, you idiot!" Gradually, we seemed to lose our affection for gravity, and after a few falls became aware that gravity was no longer our friend (except for the fact that toilets still flushed down the tube, which was some consolation).

Both Seán and I did parachute jumps. Mine were less adventurous than his. I was temporarily sent to an Army base with a few 101st Airborne Rangers that just loved to have fun with Air Force officers. They said, "How about we show you how to parachute?" After an hour or two over beer at the "O" club, this vaguely sounded like a good idea. So, several rangers began to instruct me, including a master sergeant who apparently had a sadistic genetic dislike for Air Force captains.

After a bit of ground school, they gave me instructions on packing my own parachute. "What if it doesn't open?" I asked. "You have a reserve chute, which you also have to pack yourself, and if that doesn't work, bring them back and we'll repack for you, guaranteed." Well, that was encouraging.

We used vintage Huey Vietnam helicopters as jump bases. These were worn-out things redolent of JP-4 fuel, overheated gear box oil, and latent jungle odors. And noisy, except when I occasionally got to fly in the front left seat.

My first jump was probably 5,000 feet and all



downhill. The first 4,900 feet were pretty nice, except for the kick in the ass from the sadistic sergeant because I had hesitated at the open door. As a flight meteorologist, I had advised the crew pilot of nasty low-level winds, but Rangers tended to regard weather forecasts as useless information.

The last 100 feet landed me in the edge of a nice pine tree, despite my efforts to control the descent. I was left hanging by several weak pine branches. After some swinging around, I finally got untangled and gathered up the chute, waiting to be found.

I made a few more jumps without incident and never did return my chute for the promised "guarantee." I should have paid a bit more attention to gravity after that.

~

Seán has more adventures.

In the early 60s, I fought forest fire from the southern border of Oregon to Canada with a Pulaski and a shovel. The Pulaski is a firefighter's tool, with an ax head on one side and a grub hoe on the other. Along with a shovel, it is used to build fire lines.

We worked up to 16 hours per day. All the time, I wanted to become a smokejumper. At one point, they took me off the fire line to make me a radio operator in headquarters.

For seven winters, I made ship-to-shore calls for the U.S. Navy as a volunteer. My job was to patch my radio into the commercial phone line. Sometimes it was an AMROSS, American Red Cross emergency call, to connect the shipboard sailor to his home. If this connection to the Afloat and Overseas Network led to smokejumper school, I was all for it.

Before applying, I decided that I needed practice jumping out of an airplane. For two or three hundred dollars, I could parachute from a small four-place Cessna out of the Snohomish airport. The day of reconning found me strapped into a parachute with a "static line" in my right hand, waiting to board the Cessna.

I was to be first out, and the pilot guided me to sit on the cockpit floor with my back to the instrument panel. The passenger door on my side of the cockpit had been removed. My bravado disappeared as the pilot attached my static line to the floor of the open-door cockpit and explained how to exit the plane.

I was told to face the doorway when we neared the drop zone and rest my feet on the step secured to the cockpit just below the open doorway. My next step was to extend my hands to grasp the wing strut and wait for the crew chief to slap my calf, which was my signal to jump.

My mistake took place as the pilot crossed the jump zone. I flexed my knees and leaped from the step. My body crashed against the side of the Cessna, jerking me upside down. I watched the plane disappear from my line of sight.

The static line jerked tight and I yelled "Geronimo" as the chute unraveled between my legs, snapping me upright between the wonderful canopy and the view of the ground between my feet. An unseen dog barked off in the distance, as if to announce my presence high in the sky.

~

Remember, gravity is not merely a suggestion, but rather a law that gets more severely enforced as one grows older.



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Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?

By Stephen Buller

Washington Governor Ferguson is championing a new "millionaire tax" as a way to address budget shortfalls and income inequality. Both of these are real and serious issues, but will yet another tax solve the problem? Let's talk about this tax specifically and use it as a springboard to critique our overall tax system.

"In this world nothing can be said to be certain, but death and taxes." This phrase was popularized by Benjamin Franklin, though if it is to be believed, people have understood it for a very long time. It speaks to two eternal, human truths - our mortality and the nature of power.

While I would argue death looks very similar for each of us, taxes come in different shapes and sizes. It's important to understand the terms "regressive" and "progressive" when discussing taxes: The former impacts lower-income individuals disproportionately, and the latter the opposite.

Washington's sales tax on retail goods is regressive because, assuming both the rich and poor drink milk, a \$1 tax on a \$10 gallon of milk represents a larger portion of a poor individual's income. The federal income tax is progressive because the tax rate increases as incomes increase.

The proposed millionaire tax would be progressive, taxing 9.9% of an individual's income over \$1 million (M)/year. Currently, it would only affect 0.5% of Washingtonians. To the other 99.5%, this might sound like a wonderful idea, but there are a few problems with the simple mantra, "tax the rich."

First, if a government specifically targets the wealthiest in their jurisdiction, they are targeting the people who have the greatest means to pick up and leave. Jeff Bezos is a perfect example, having recently moved to Florida, likely to avoid Washington's new capital gains tax.

Second, if we base taxes off absolute numbers, like \$1M, we must consider the United States Treasury's mismanagement of our currency. That \$10 gallon of milk cost \$0.36 in 1913, the year the Federal Reserve was founded. \$1M might seem like

Island Resilience

a large income in early 2026, but give it a few years, and it will be below the poverty line. An example of a similar issue is the alternative minimum tax, which affected 155 people when enacted in 1969 and is projected to affect more than 7M people when the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act expires in 2026.

Third, all taxes are slippery slopes, or a foot in the door if you will. Milton Friedman said there was nothing so permanent as a temporary government program. The current federal income tax law started (also in 1913, interestingly) as a progressive tax of 1-7% on incomes over \$500,000/year. Now, you'll pay 10% on income over approximately \$16,000/year, increasing progressively.

Note how all three of these work together: As wealthy people flee jurisdictions or find other ways to avoid taxes, governments lose tax revenue. This leads them to expand the tax base, affecting more people. All the while, our federal government prints more currency, causing the prices of everything to go up - another (stealth) tax.

Enough about the problem. What's the solution? Of course, it's complicated. But the simplest place to start is with the other side of the budget equation. Every individual of a certain age understands they must spend less than they earn or risk going bankrupt. But our governments don't follow this simple monetary law.

One of the reasons for this is that the U.S. possesses the world reserve currency and therefore grapples with the "Triffen Dilemma," named after economist Robert Triffen. This dilemma is also a paradox: Because all countries across the world need U.S. dollars to trade with each other, the U.S. must run trade deficits, but creating dollars to do so inherently erodes confidence in the dollar, which risks losing its status as world reserve currency.

Possessing the world reserve currency has been fantastic for the U.S. for many years, allowing us to effectively export inflation (dollars) and import real goods and services. But political moves like sanctions, barring unfriendly nations from the dollar trade system (SWIFT), and straight up seizing Russia's reserves have accelerated the

decline of the dollar, and other nations are finding ways of trading amongst each other outside the dollar system. I would be more adamant about protecting the dollar if it helped the average citizen, but the massive wealth transfers are going ... elsewhere.

As I said, It's complicated. Budget deficits are only one of our problems. Maintaining world reserve currency status has given Americans higher standards of living than much of the world, and when we lose it, we may be surprised at the true cost of things.

However, when we lose the ability to create trillions of dollars out of thin air and export it around the world, purchasing real goods and services in return, never-ending deficits will become impossible. Governments will be forced to spend less than they take in. This will force them to assess where tax dollars are being spent, and it will incentivize people to root out fraud and abuse.

In my opinion, the solution to government mismanagement of tax dollars is not to give the government more tax dollars. It is to force them to assess the programs that actually add value to their constituents. And the best way to decrease income inequality is not to punish people for earning more, but to agree as a society (through tax and other laws) to use real money, rather than money the government can create at will and give to whomever they feel is deserving.

Remember, if the government wanted everyone to "pay their fair share," everyone would pay X% of their income, and that would be the end of it. Government is far more complicated than that, made up of millions of individuals, all incentivized to keep their jobs, or get a promotion by creating more government jobs, or secure their job by creating another program. And we haven't even touched on all the other nuances in politics ...

The U.S. dollar faces increasing challenges to its status as world reserve currency, and the U.S. is making bolder and bolder moves on the world stage to hold onto it. We will either move to a sensible money, like gold and silver, in a methodical, coordinated way with other world governments, with a focus on peace and prosperity ... Or we will squeeze tighter and tighter until the whole thing breaks.

My hope is for the first. My bet is on the second.

Kick the "Cancel Culture" Habit With Me, in 2026

By March Twisdale

Recently, I attended the first inaugural meeting of Freedom Sisters, hosted by Harborview Fellowship Church in Gig Harbor. Women living in Western Washington gathered on a cold, rainy night in early December to discuss how best to recover and move on from our region's epidemic of cancel culture, virtue signaling, and skyrocketing intolerance.

Freedom Sisters is a great idea, and I hope they do well. But, this group has not made it onto my plate for the new year. Why? And if so, why do I even mention them?

Because of Jennie Young, a state committeewoman for the Pierce County Republican Party, who was the primary guest speaker of the evening. She told three real-life stories about women who changed our society, culture, and shared history. These women were not politicians or activists. They were everyday women with conservative, Christian values, who focused on what was right in front of them. In so doing, they directly and indirectly caused powerful and crucially important changes in American Society.

"Choose your lane," Jennie Young said.

I instantly knew what would be my lane in 2026. How I could "leave the world better than I found it." That lane is not to get involved with Freedom Sisters. That lane is not my Substack. That lane is not to be found on social media, at marches or rallies or protest events.

My lane, in 2026, will be my monthly articles written for The Vashon Loop, and I'm going to focus on two topics. First, the amazing "aha" moments as I've shifted from being a full-time homemaker to a full-time wage earner. Homemaking is a form of super glue for society, and I will be laying out reasons for why a healthy society has more homemakers, not less. Secondly, I'm going to tackle "cancel culture" on Vashon Island.

In 2026, I will write several articles sharing my personal rationale for how I've come to hold views considered "unacceptable" by our Island's cancel culture crowd. I hope that by sharing the deep, complex and very thoughtful reasons behind my current views and opinions, I will surprise readers who have made the mistake of writing people off as two-dimensional, evil characters should they not fall in line and parrot what

they've been told is appropriate thinking.

My readers may disagree with me at the end of each article, but that's to be expected. As I wrote in December 2025, we all agree and disagree. This is a fundamental truth and, as an American, I believe true diversity is beautiful to behold. Of course, "beholding" it is a bit hard to do when people are being threatened and pressured to the point where they limit themselves to only uttering "acceptable thoughts" or otherwise staying silent.

And so, I'm going to go out on a limb and speak the unspeakable.

Am I worried? No. It is my lived experience that most Americans are balanced thinkers with middle ground values. The vast majority of us exist within the bulging middle of the Bell Curve. Yes, the screamers at either end tend to dominate our air waves, screens and talk shows, but they do not reflect society.

I expect a lot of Islanders are going to be nodding their heads. Albeit, quietly. Begging the question, "Why are so many of us choosing silence?"

We have not arrived here accidentally. There are "chaos makers" afoot, intentionally tossing hot potato issues into our communities like bombs. After the initial explosion, they resemble

biological warfare, becoming a corrosive disease spreading throughout our people, weakening and crumbling our beautiful society and culture from within.

Totalitarianism and its hallmarks of speech/thought control (which is one of the results of cancel culture bullying) is never an accident. It's never organic. It never comes from the grassroots. It's a plot by people who seek power, over us. Not with us. And we must guard against it.

In 2026, I will do my part by going out on a limb, each month, and saying the unpopular thing. What could be more American than that?

Disagreement, in a healthy society, is a form of mutual learning. Debate is glorious, when done respectfully. Together, by opening our mouths and speaking honestly, we can reinvigorate our community and embrace true diversity, all while being honorable and true to ourselves.

This will be my one lane this year, and what a relief! Setting a limit on who and what gets my attention and time has left me feeling both relieved and happy, knowing I'm doing my part. As many of you have also discovered, learning to say "no" is one of life's great lessons.

Boundaries, it turns out, are beautiful.

The Story of Tomtomtidimiddletom

Part 5: Tom Goes Home

By Andy Valencia

Previous parts of the story are available at vashonloop.com/tom/

Tom, the weed who accidentally rooted onto the bumper of a car, is on a long journey. Parked at a campground, he went to seed without dying, and is getting to know his new children.

Tom spent the rest of the day teaching his new children about the world. They knew very little, so this was mostly introducing words. Tom would say a word like "Water!" and then various plants in the campground would repeat it. "Water!", "Water!", and - sometimes a tree would help - "WATER." Then his new babies would say "Water!", "Water!", "Water!", "Water!" and "Tim!".

That one weed just didn't have the knack of new words, and Tom wondered if it was OK. (But that weed - Tim - grew up to be a uniquely heroic weed, and perhaps someday I'll tell his story.)

Tom went to sleep with plans to tell his children some stories of his home, but when he awoke, the people were already busy filling his car with all sorts of boxes and other items. Oh no! This was what they did before one of their long journeys. Tom told his children as many things as he could as the car filled up, and although his young didn't really understand, the other plants promised that they would remember and teach them when they were older.

And then the car started, and rolled away, with Tom saying "Goodbye!" and his children saying "Bye!", "Bye!", "Bye!", "Bye!", and "Tim!"

They were rolling along at high speed again, and Tom settled into a dreamlike state to pass the time. He was startled back to wakefulness as his car slowly passed a truck. So far as he could tell, the world was full of trucks. But this one was something new.

Most trucks had an enormous box

on back. He'd never had a chance to discover what was inside them, and there were so many that he now just ignored them entirely. Instead of a box, this truck's back was just a large metal cradle, and laying lengthwise in the cradle were 20 or more logs.

In the world of plants, trees were held in a bit of awe by all the other plants. They were so tall, and they lived almost forever, and they talked among each other in a deep rumble-like thunder. But trees grow up, and the sight of so many lengths of tree laying sideways made Tom speak to them before his shyness took hold.

"Hello, Trees! What are you doing back there?"

And, amazingly, one of the tree trunks answered him.

"Hum hum hoom hum hum, hello little plant. We are going away."

Tom pondered that. When a weed went away, it meant a bird or a deer had eaten you up. A deer couldn't have even seen the top of this tree when it was still standing.

"Why are you sideways? You are going away to where?"

He couldn't believe a tree was still talking to him!

"Oh man man man needs us us us. Bites us and down we fall! Then off to become boards, and houses. Or..." for the first time a bit of emotion came into his voice, "firewood."

And Tom understood a little bit. He had seen what a house looked like on the outside. He couldn't imagine how, but these enormous tough trees could turn into houses. He'd even heard about burning, which for plants usually meant dry grass catching on fire.

He'd never realized it before, but these trees were plants - just like him. So much bigger, and yet they lived their lives until the end was upon them. Weeds could be cut, or eaten, or trampled. Trees, too, were cut and fell, and now here they were lying

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stacked, carried away to become the stuff of houses.

"When I'm gone, I'll have children all over the driveway!"

The tree rumbled with humor for the first time.

"Mohoho hohoho hum ho! Trees have children as far as you can see! Children to cover mountains!"

They were now past the truck, and Tom listened to the deep laugh of the tree, with the vision in his mind of endless green stands of trees, covering whole mountains.

The days and nights went by, and Tom really wasn't paying attention any more. He had seen so much, and he wanted to watch his babies grow, but instead his car rolled on and on away from them. He was, after all, just a small weed in this big world, and he was getting tired and sad. He didn't know the word, but he was homesick.

Suddenly, he was alert. That smell! It was wet and salty. He hadn't noticed it before this journey, but now he realized it was a smell he'd associated with some of his car's trips. There was a bump and then a watery rolling motion which he also remembered. He hardly dared hope.

Bump again, and then more driving. The car turned in at a familiar stretch of road, and there was his barn! And the house! And there was the big old weed Samsamrotatidion! And lots of the other weeds he knew so well.

They started calling "Tom!" and even the grass was calling "Ssssttooommmssss." The car stopped, and the people were busy taking all sorts of things out.

Finally, they were finished unloading, and went in their house.



Llaughing Llamas Chronicles

By Daniel Hooker

I had to cut ties with an old friend who was dragging me down.

Yup, mountain climbing is a hard sport.

I took a laxative before New Year's Eve, just so I wouldn't drag myself through the same manure as last year.

My friend made a suggestion for traveling free. He said we should disguise ourselves as luggage for the Hawaiian Airlines baggage check in.

We got the right stickers for Maui. When we arrived, he was dizzy, and passed out at the carousel. I thought it was terminal, but he came around.

I met a microbiologist the other day.

He was a lot bigger than what you would expect.

My new girlfriend wanted to meet this morning at the gym. She never showed up.

That's when it hit me.

We were never meant to work out.

A funeral director tried to sell me a coffin. He said, "It's a New Year sales event!"

I said, "That's the last thing I need!"

Whenever I see a plane, I always ask, "Is it on the level?"

My girlfriend threatened to feed my dog my dinner if I wasn't home in 15 minutes.

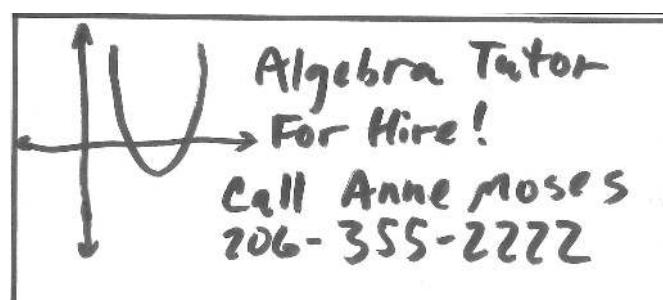
No one deserves that kind of treatment. I was home in ten minutes.

News You May Have Missed



- A San Francisco house blows up
- A palm tree that blooms once in a lifetime
- Tragedy and the fraud that follows

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Aries (March 20-April 19)

You could say that Aries and its solar chart, involving all 11 other signs, is the map of the "environment of self-awareness." And if that is true, then the most important thing you can do is to be aware of yourself. However, despite many Eastern teachings that center on the Be Here Now concept, it's necessary that you track your movement through space and through consciousness over a period of time. Everything is changing so fast that it's difficult to have any sense of how you felt yesterday or of tomorrow's potential. All of the astrology in Aries is pointing you inward, toward an internal self-awareness that is difficult to maintain under digital conditions. And one way to track that is to track your awareness in the immediate sense but also as you move from day-to-day and place-to-place. Then you will have a sense of the astounding changes you are going through—and moreover, how to use them.

Taurus (April 19-May 20)

In our world right now, what does "taking leadership" look like? You might relate to the concept of tending a fire, maintaining the home and keeping bread in the oven. You may relate to taking charge of the organization of space in your immediate environment. Your calling of leadership is the "ask not what your community can do for you" kind, but rather "what you can do for your community." This translates to holding your little part of the world together in a time of enormous stress and strain, and getting together with others who have the same ethos. As for when and when not to help, determine whether your actions would harm you or the person you're helping.

Gemini (May 20-June 21)

Life lesson number one for you is being aware of your environment. What your astrology is suggesting you be aware of is everything imperceptible; everything you are not noticing; everything that has dropped out of your awareness; many things you've forgotten. Now, this presents a diversity of challenges. How do you tune into what you cannot perceive? How can you identify what you do not know? That is often a matter of where you direct your attention. It's also a matter of what you allow to get your attention. Things to consider are: who and what do you find destabilizing? Who and what do you find grounding? What is your experience of the passage of time? Wherever you may find yourself, in "real space" or "virtual space," ask yourself: where am I and what am I doing here? Finally, pay attention to anger. Any form of emotion on the anger spectrum (from frustration to rage) is the invisible environment trying to get your attention.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Events over the next two months will draw you out of your famous shell. It may seem like you're being drawn into the world, but the magnetism, the tropism, is toward yourself. Yet you get maximum benefit from taking part in worldly activities including and especially your true work. That is different from the work you do because you have to; the career you have because that's what you were pushed into or somehow ended up doing. The next few months are the time of your life

**Planet Waves**

by Eric Francis <http://www.PlanetWaves.net>



for aligning with what some call "right livelihood"—the one that is right for you. I can tell you that your astrology is thundering with the message of: given the choice, do what is right for you. And if you seem to have no option, figure out a way to give yourself one. The important thing is that you feel good about what you're doing at the same time you are being true to yourself and to some larger purpose. If you are looking around for ideas, pay attention to what you discover is missing.

Leo (July 22-Aug. 23)

You are soon to be looking right at something you had not noticed. This will happen just ahead of when the Sun enters your opposite sign, around Jan. 15 through 19. A seemingly new factor, set of options or a potential collaborator will emerge from what seemed like a void. Whatever you may encounter, remember that it's part of a developing story. You don't have to rush into any decisions; just dance with your environment. Pick out difficult to perceive factors that are right nearby; don't be intimidated if something (anyone or anything) emerges that seems to have power over you. Rather, establish a relationship with it. The influence of Pluto in your opposite sign is going to make itself known in waves, and in specific exchanges. Take each opportunity to tune up your discernment. Learn to make decisions about what is right for you. Treat each of these encounters as a distinct opportunity to learn something new.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sep. 22)

The story of this incarnation is about being free from what you might call corporate obligations. I would define those as commitments that you seem to be invested in where there is no easy way out. Getting out would seem to be the best possible choice, but that projects the matter on to external circumstances and not your state of mind. In about two weeks, Neptune is moving on from your relationship area, where it's been lurking since 2011. You may decide that the presence of a planet associated with delusion, deception and denial has led you to make choices you either regret or wish you could undo, and you may notice that you made certain choices or commitments based on a misunderstanding of who you are. So the remedy would have to begin with getting solid with yourself in a clear and truthful understanding of who you are—today.

Libra (Sep. 22-Oct. 23)

The Greatest Show on Earth is about to unfold in your opposite sign, Aries. It's already been doing so, but like the noise on the street in an urban neighborhood, you may have gotten used to it. However, over the next few weeks, the energy ramps up rapidly. We enter one of the most unusual phases in modern astrological history as the twin conjunctions occur—Saturn meets Neptune, and Chiron meets Eris, within a matter of weeks. Lord knows what this represents in your life. This astrology is personal to you in one sense, and then in another, represents global and generational

movement. As part of your observation and sense-making process, you're looking for openings, ideas and opportunities for co-creation and collaboration. They will be there. You're looking for people who have some sense of detachment and true awareness of the changes that are happening. That is your meeting place and your common ground. And that's your shared basis for starting a real conversation.

Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 22)

How do you know when you're being honest with yourself? "How do you know when you don't know?"—the most fundamental question of journalism and of life. It would seem that the only safeguard is to assume you're wrong until that no longer stands up to scrutiny. You would have to first see the assumptions you make, then question them. Neither is easy. Others may play a role. How do you respond when someone challenges you? Yes, they might be wrong. But they might be right—and it might matter. It helps to engage with people whose views you ardently disagree with and let them dismantle your viewpoint. As for the things you don't talk about, a self-honesty protocol must be gentle but persistent. Only then can you notice inconsistencies in your perspective. People are more intimidated by you than you may recognize. This creates a blind spot in your perception.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 22)

It would serve you well to have a diversity of people in your environment of whom you ask what they see, observe, know and think. Imagine a kind of personal intelligence network that's not about spying on people but on making sure you know everything you need to know. This is not about being smarter but rather about a certain kind of sensitivity that is challenging for your broad-strokes philosophical nature. And sorry if this is a tender point, but you will need to keep an eye on the matter of self-obsession. If you're going to focus your "self," let it be through creative process and having fun. This is where you will find both yourself and your true freedom of being—in what's known as the 5th house, Aries. You are most surely going to find that you're your most devoted lover. And that's a good thing to be.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 20)

Mars entered your sign just in time for the holidays. Be aware that Mars is going to be passing through a configuration in your sign that I've called the "Family Hunger Game" pattern. I suggest going only where you feel welcome; do everything in our power to raise inner awareness, address matters of healing, and ask family about the ways we might have hurt them. At least give them a voice upward through the generations, which can heal the long-gone past. This idea stands far outside the purview of traditional psychology and is subject to various New Age b.s. interpretations. But I understand it to be real. True healing emanates in all directions, making contact with ancestors and descendants. You're in

the vortex of this possibility right now.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 19)

As an Aquarian, you embody patterns: of thought, of technology, of society, and much else. Pluto's role is to disrupt those patterns. This could happen many ways, and things could get worse before people figure out they don't want others making their decisions for them. You are on the vanguard of that process; you must declare your independence from phony digital tribal nonsense before the rest of us do, as a matter of personal survival. The reason most people don't actually individuate is because they're terrified of being cast off from their tribe. But most of the tribes we experience are false, made of banded-together people being shocked out of themselves by electricity. And you are now in this midst, with the prime directive to assert your true being despite all of the insanity, confusion and chaos. This will not be easy but you have all the power of the gorgeous six-part Pluto system to support you.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)

Here is some news: At 17:37:59 UTC, on Monday, Jan. 26, 2026, Neptune slips out of Pisces for the last time, not to return until 2175. This ends an era that began in April 2011. Neptune moves so slowly, its transits can seem interminable. But soon it will have finally made it to the other side. There have been many ups and downs. At times you felt like you might drown. Even after it moves on, Neptune will be present in your 2nd house Aries, though I reckon its leaving Pisces will lift an invisible pressure from you. Neptune almost always arrives and persists with a sense of isolation and misunderstanding. It can cloud your mind with delusions and denial. It can cast a spell of invisibility. It can also reveal that humanity and its empires have "feet of clay." Yet at the same time, Neptune has also granted you permission to envision your life as what you want it to be. You get to dream a little, or a lot. Put it in writing—in ink, stone, or clay.

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If you can't explain something simply, you don't understand it well enough.

~ Albert Einstein

Poem From "Grief Age Love"

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

January 1st

Now the gentle snow
is resting on every branch.

The dry wood burns
with a bright flame

and there's enough wood
in the woodshed
for the winter.

The apples taste
as if they were picked
this morning.

I'm not much for resolutions
though I'm sitting here
pen in hand.

It's the first of the year
of my 80th year

a time for less
keeping track
and more eating apples
by the warming fire.

~ Roger Davies

Roger Davies, of Halifax Nova Scotia, is the brother of Islander Jeanie Okimoto. He left the U.S. in 1968 and is the author of "Yes to Canada: When Grampa Refused to Fight in the Vietnam War."



Island poetry in
these pages

How about yours?



Submit your poems to
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Write to: vashonloop-poetry
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Wishing you all Happiness, Longevity, and Prosperity in 2026!

Photo by Claudia Hollander-Lucas



***Kin Ship* by Anne Cotter Moses**



Deep Space Rendezvous, Part 2

Continued from Front Page

shifting their state or frequency, they could enter our physical reality directly, rather than traveling for thousands of years.

Some of these beings are described as more positively oriented, with a focus on unity and cooperation, while others are more dark and self-oriented. That's not so different from humans, really. Wherever there is intelligence, there seem to be different kinds of beings, with different orientations.

What may be coming is greater knowledge of our own hidden history, which may be much longer and stranger than we thought. There are stories about ancient interference, DNA being altered, and capabilities we once had and lost. There are also ideas that our lifespans were once much longer, and that we had abilities like direct or telepathic communication which were shut down.

When you think about it from this perspective, stories like the Tower of Babel feel less ancient and more like a memory of a real shift, a time when people stopped understanding each other the way they once did. Whether you take those stories literally or symbolically, consider that we may not have the full picture of our history or where we fit in.

Interesting to me is that many of these traditions say the earth itself, and we here on earth, are approaching a period of change. For us, that means awareness expands. A big part of it is that things that were hidden can't stay hidden - you can't stop it.

Some people say the beings are waiting for us to be ready - not technologically, but vibrationally - and that they want us to be ready. You may have heard about this: our vibration needs to be high enough.

When I talk about vibration, I mean it in the same way that people talk about consciousness change. It's not mystical, but more about how we handle what's in front of us. To me, being vibrationally ready means being able to hear new information without immediately going to fear.

Also, in this story, extraterrestrial beings aren't invaders or rescuers so much as karmic witnesses - and in some cases, participants - in a transition that's already underway.

I don't claim to know what's true. I do know that looking at the universe this way makes more sense to me. Like everything else, it comes back to choice. You can look at these ideas with fear or curiosity. For me, this way of interpreting things keeps me happy.

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**Blessed are the
hearts that can bend;
they shall never be
broken.**

~ Albert Camus