



THE VASHON LOOP

Vol. 23, #08

SERVING VASHON AND ITS NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES ~ FREE

August 7, 2026



Letter From Olga

In May and June 2025, a two-part article, “There’s No Place Like Home – a Ukrainian Woman’s Journey” by Daniel Hooker was featured in The Loop. A companion article, “Olga and the Ukraine War,” by Andy Valencia also appeared in May 2025. Read about Olga at vashonloop.com.

I want to say how grateful I am to be part of such a warm and welcoming community as Vashon. From the very beginning, I’ve felt an incredible amount of kindness, support, and understanding from the people here.

I would especially like to thank Daniel, as well as everyone at the newspaper, for giving me the opportunity to share a small part of my story with the Vashon community. I honestly didn’t expect that article to have such a meaningful impact on my life.

Since it was published, many people have recognized me, stopped to say hello, asked about my journey, and offered encouragement and support. One of the most important things that came from the article was that I was connected with a nonprofit immigration lawyer. They have already giving me incredibly valuable guidance about my immigration case, and I truly can’t express how grateful I am. As someone who has limited financial resources, finding experienced legal help has always felt out of reach, so this opportunity means more to me than words can say.

The article did much more than tell my story – it helped me feel that I truly belong here. It reminded me that there are people who genuinely care and are willing to help someone they had never met before. That kindness has given me hope and confidence during a very uncertain chapter of my life.

Thank you again for giving me a voice and for the work you do for this community. I will always be grateful for the difference your article has made in my life.

~ Olga

Curious about Olga’s bouquet? Go to Page 5.



Cash Is Queen

By Rich Osborne, Owner, ALL THINGS RICH at the Waterfront Market @ Ruston

Fifteen years ago, I started taking credit cards. It seemed like a good idea at the time. I engaged a local processor. I bought a card reader to plug into my cell phone, and away I went. Within weeks I started having problems. The server would go down. The network would go offline. The damn thing ran at the dazzling speed of the Rainier Glacier. So I changed companies. Higher cost but lower service. And changed companies again and again, for nine years.

Six years ago, a friend who was getting out of retail sales sold me a used terminal from a large company. They were nice. Organized. Efficient. They offered me a stable rate of 3% of sales. They also offered me a “no-swipe charge” alternative for an additional 0.15%.

I thought “Great!” and went with it. Things were good for four years.

Then one day, in early 2025, I checked my statement and there were those damn swipe charges. I called them, pointing out that we had a contract. I was told that they had “Sunset That Program” in late 2024, sending me a bulletin in my statement, couched in incomprehensible, illegible legalese.

When I asked about my 0.15% added charge, they explained that 3% was a “Special Introductory Rate.” I was then handed off to Chad, my “Customer Relations Expert,” for the most insulting conversation of my life. Chad (possibly AI) explained to me how to add the swipe charge to my customer’s bill. He/it told me, “It doesn’t affect your bottom line. It’s only 15 cents. Customers

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Why Share My Story?

By Gates (Pam) Johnson

As you may know if you have read my previous rantings here in The Loop, I have been dealing with a cancer diagnosis and treatments since March. For some weird reason, I decided my feelings and experiences might be good fodder for my monthly musings.

People may ask, “Why do you feel the need to air your private health stuff?” I have given that question many hours of thought and came up with the following: Maybe someone who is just starting out on a cancer journey might find some insights and perhaps even comfort hearing from someone who is going through it, too.

I don’t claim to be a caregiver or over-sharer or even someone driven to help everybody. But one thing I do have is compassion. Also, I have a willingness to open up about my experiences and feelings, warts and all. Not saying that what I am going through is the same or similar to other people’s stuff. But if reading about someone else’s health junk can help, hey, why not?

I’ve gone through the fear of waiting for the diagnosis, the diagnosis itself, the initial doctor appointments, the plan, the surgery, and now the

healing and year-long treatments. It ain’t a bed of roses, I can tell you that. Tears by the gallon. Sleepless nights. Fear of the unknown. And loneliness, even when family and friends are just a phone call away.

How am I dealing with that giant bag of emotions? Some days, really well; some days, a soggy tear-stained puddle. I’ve learned some useful things: This too shall pass, tomorrow will be better, just cry it out, I won’t feel bad and be sick forever, people are willing to help but I have to ask and receive the help when needed.

These are difficult lessons for a hard-headed old broad who has lived alone more years than not. People really care and want to help; they just don’t know how to or when. I’ve had to get out of the old rut of doing everything myself and ask for help when I need it.

Trust me, I have needed help, more often than I would like to admit. Funny thing, when asked, nobody has turned me down. That was an eye-opener to someone who has always considered myself to be a loner. Quelle surprise!

Long story short, I am now into the year-long treatment phase. Infusions every six weeks.

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Left: Is this wildflower growing on your land?
Think twice about leaving it there!
See Page 2



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Vashon Rules of the Road

Do what you want, as long as you stare straight ahead while doing it.

Death by Flower on Vashon

By Andy Valencia

As our summer begins its slow descent into fall, take a moment to relax and enjoy the flowers which nature has provided.

Just kidding! This is Vashon, where Himalayan blackberry will cross your back patio and force its way into your house. You'll have plenty of time to rest when it's winter, dark all day, and the world is nothing but mud. Until then, put on your gloves and get to work.

It's been a while since the reminder went out, so in this issue we'll talk about a weed that invades fields and gardens aggressively, and is so toxic that Washington state law requires that you control it. This weed is tansy ragwort.

It grows a foot or more tall, with small, cheerful yellow flowers that have a daisy-like petal shape.

Does looking at them make you happy? Because although the whole of the plant is toxic, the highest concentration of the pyrrolizidine alkaloids is in the flower. These alkaloids can damage your liver, and can be deadly in higher concentrations.

You are probably not going to munch on tansy yourself, but give a thought to your neighborhood deer. When tansy is fresh, it has a distinctive flavor which deer will avoid. Unfortunately, as it ages and dries, that flavor goes away and deer can eat it unknowingly, with devastating consequences.

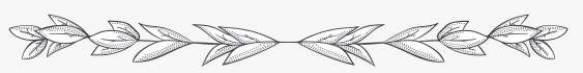
Hunters will want to stop and think, since these alkaloids are not removed by cooking, and humans can be exposed by consuming poisoned meat. If a deer looks unhealthy during hunting season, you may want to give it a pass.

If you garden with chemicals, you can look up which available herbicides are effective on tansy ragwort. If you cut off and bag any developing or flowering stems, then spray the base of the plant, you can probably kill it before it develops a new

stalk and flowers. Be sure to check back on any previously infested areas, as it often reappears.

Without chemicals, you'll need a shovel. Dig all around the root ball of the plant, and lever it out of the ground. Shake the dirt loose, then bag and discard the plant with its roots. As with herbicides, it will likely come back and you'll have to battle it for several seasons before it peters out.

It's a horrible weed, but the deer and your neighbors will thank you for killing it off. It spreads easily from property to property, and if you let it get far enough out of control, you might even have somebody from King County knocking on your door. Who needs that kind of hassle?



Cash Is Queen

Continued from Front Page

don't care about 15 cents."

I thanked him for explaining how gravity works and hung up. I then called the other four large credit card processing companies. It turns out that they are all playing the same grift, screwing over the customers while forcing the merchants to do their dirty work for them.

I thought about it and remembered what I have been reading about this issue in, among other sources, "The Vashon Loop." I concluded that my customers are not idiots, can do math, and understand that \$0.15 times a thousand purchases a year adds up to \$150, enough to take one's partner out to a nice dinner at a nice restaurant, even at today's prices. So, I tried my own idea.

I started my "Cash is Queen" program. I posted the following note at my ALL THINGS RICH booth at

the Waterfront Market @ Ruston.

Cash is Queen

Our credit card processing company recently added a "transaction fee." Please use cash if you have it. This will keep our prices where they are, not passing credit charges through to you. Thanks, Rich

Then I watched. Over the next six months, my percentage of cash sales doubled.

This 3% reduction in charges more than covers the swipe charge for people who don't carry cash. So I am saving money. My customers appreciate saving the swipe charge. They appreciate that I am looking out for their interests. Customer loyalty is a real thing. The only loser is the processing company. And I'm okay withthat.

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Vashon! The DSHS Van will be here

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The Vashon Loop

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A Series of Piratical Events

By Marc J. Elzenbeck

How do you become a pirate ship? One suspects it's always been a tricky process, what with obtaining pesky letters of marque, patiently hiding in keys to ambush passing merchant ships, and the risks of your crew swinging by their necks from a yardarm.

Paul Freeman of the good ship Sara takes care to say he's not her owner. Technically speaking, he is. But to him, the tall wooden schooner is more a responsibility, a personified calling that found him in 2024, while she was plotting her eventual course to Vashon.

Captain Freeman describes himself as Sara's supervisor, and circumstances support that perspective and his destination.

If you were a 122-year-old vessel that had plied the Baltic, and were scrolling through LinkedIn resumes over your morning coffee, Freeman is exactly who would stand out as your Captain. An engineer by formal education, he's an industrial diver, world adventurer, welder, constructor of canals and monolithic domes, and dad of a recent Pirate Camp attendee.

From its moorage near Portland, Sara seems to have dialed up whatever karmic broadband ships commune with and said, "He'll do. Bring him to me for an interview."

Captain Freeman had just decided to retire from hazardous underwater construction work, and was looking for a sailboat he could stand up in without hitting his head. From that reasonable start, he wound up with a 70-foot long, 80-ton blue water traveler.

Oregonian millionaires bought Sara in the 1970s and commissioned a carpenter crew from Denmark to sail her across two oceans to a berth on the Columbia. The crew stayed on to convert the decks below into living quarters on par with a luxury yacht.

By the early 2000s, Sara found another caretaker ready to invest in her future. In 2004, a family undertook a remarkable restoration,

reinforcing the hull with steel and encasing it in a new 4- to 5-inch shell of 6,800 psi concrete. These costly restorations ensured stout integrity for another 100 years or so.

Still, there are significant milestones to clear before Sara reaches a waiting moorage that has been secured on Quartermaster Harbor. Paul first moved Sara downriver to Astoria on the Oregon coast (the location for the movie "Goonies"), where this year she hopes to serve as an attraction and Halloween venue.

Interestingly, the ship was stolen by nighttime thieves along the way and had to be chased down and recovered, but that is another story. Long story short, there is strong local interest in not losing the ship.

The next big step for Sara is to seal the top deck and prepare her for the winter rains. After that, the goal is a tow to Port Townsend, the Wooden Boat Capital of the world, where a replacement will be fitted for her cut main mast to allow for self-propulsion.

In this, Captain Freeman is open to ideas and solutions. The cost of keeping Sara stationary is

From
the
Editors



The Sara Historic Pirate Ship

significantly less than making her fully functional again, and the biggest expense isn't materials, but labor.

The final leg will be to put Sara down the Sound to her rightful home on Vashon for day sails and night stays. We'll be eagerly tracking Sara's progress and reporting on it. In the meantime, your views and investment are encouraged; visit the ship's web site at <https://www.sarapirateship.com/>.

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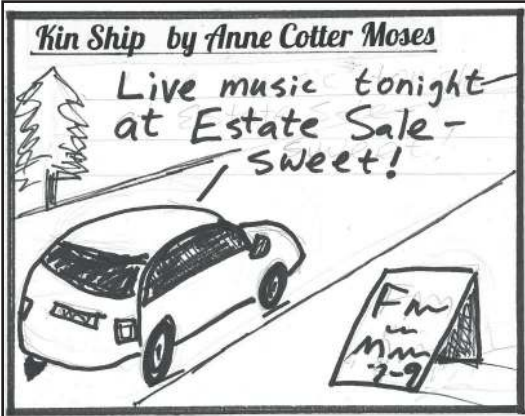


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From Cowrie Shell to Clam Shell

A Hippie Comes Home

By Suzanna Leigh

The end of my sojourn with the Pilgrims Christian Commune in Hawaii came when a man from the home church on the mainland came to speak to us. Along with some possibly prejudiced prophecies about the coming end of the world, he told us that Ken, the head of Pilgrims, was an apostle, and that we should obey him like we would obey the apostles in the Bible.

That didn't sound right to me, from my reading of the Bible.

I pondered his words as I walked on the beach afterwards. The setting sun touched on a cowrie shell, and I picked it up. As I admired its cream and brown pattern, a seabird's cry reminded me of the seagulls on the Vashon beaches, and the cowrie shell seemed to turn into a clam shell in my hand. It was time to go home.

James and I arrived on Vashon in January of 1975, after almost a year in Hawaii. I was dressed in a long muumuu and carried in my heart the teachings from my time with the Pilgrims. I felt like I had been sheltered in the protected environment of the commune like a plant in a greenhouse. I reasoned that if the teachings were true, they would hold true out in the real world. It was time to test them.

My parents welcomed me home, and I stayed with them while I figured out my next step. My first need was transportation. Ladybug, my sweet

Island Voices



Illustration by Suzanna Leigh

little black Karmann Ghia, which I sold to Davey Powers when I left for Hawaii, had been wrecked, resurrected with a 55 gallon drum for its front, and painted blue. Even if I wanted to buy her back, she was in Arizona, in service of Davey and his brother Boone's prospecting venture.

Craig's List to the rescue, or more likely it was the classified ads in The Beachcomber.

The Cows of Gladness, my 18-foot open sailboat was waiting for me in Joe Furbush's yard, so I advertised that I wanted to trade it for a vehicle. That's how a 1967 VW van, with all the lessons it had to teach me, came into my life.

Now that I had a vehicle, it was time explore



Magnificent Ruins

Part Two: The Falcon's Nest

By Richard Odell

From Part One: "My parents would one day move to that island, and within a few years find themselves, by choice of housing, connected by an overgrown lane to the source of that pillar of smoke, a mansion that now lay in ruins. I was but five months old. Discoveries lay in wait."

Alexander was not the only figure of wonderment to loom above the borders of my New World. Nor were his beams and culverts the only legacy of enchantment. Our driveway, the entry of which was guarded by two stone pillars and an ornate, rusty, wire gate, was really only a piddling segment of a much more ambitious, but now overgrown lane that ran a quarter mile south before splitting.

One fork ran west, to reunite with the Island's main highway, to which it presented the reiteration of two more stone pillars. The other ran east, to the source of this audacity, or what remained of it: the gray ruins of a mansion called The Falcon's Nest; the work of a man few then could name, but who once afforded himself two long and landscaped driveways, one for a trip to the northend ferry, another for access to the Island at large. From here had risen the black pillar of smoke my parents had witnessed from West Seattle.

All that remained of the mansion was a deep and vast basement overseen by two stone chimneys; their fireplaces, with hearths of slate, poised over the nothingness. One fireplace evidently served the main hall, the other seemed meant for what we young explorers deemed the servant's quarters, but more likely it was the master bedroom. A naked flagpole yet stood, and a bunkhouse, a circular drive, and a horse stable now dark and crumbling in the shade of Blue Spruce trees.

By the time my siblings and I would wander onto the grounds, the half-life of occupation had diminished to where the place had an untouched quality about it. It was left to itself, but strangely, to us kids, as well.

For a long while, no one else on the Island had the same relationship to the Falcon's Nest as we did. Our driveway was the driveway to the great estate. With intersecting ravines all about, the only residence even scarcely adjacent to it at the time



Inside The Falcon's Nest - Photo from Tacoma News Tribune

was our own. As with Alexander's lumber, we seemed entrusted. Sometimes we'd bring friends. More often, for me, it drew the lone pilgrimage.

Down a short slope from the backside was the tiny bunkhouse of stripped logs, its polished interior still a warm, honey color. Such an inviting sort of place, still sunny and clean, with crispy, dry madrone leaves gathered in one corner. My brother confessed to me, some years back, that he and a friend he had damn near set the place on fire. They'd lifted a Ronson, somewhere, I guess, and had to try it out. Perhaps they'd been caught up in an echo of time.

From the ashes of the Falcon's Nest there rose a legend, and a familiar theme: There had once been a man of means, a man who could buy whatever he wanted, but for the thing he wanted most of all: the love of a certain woman. Even so, he took his wealth and built a great mansion that looked east, over the waters of the Sound, to the mountains in the distance. From the mighty beams of his new estate he hung a native longboat. On the grounds he planted deodars, blue spruce, and rhododendrons, and along the long entry lanes Mountain Ash, Norwegian Spruce, and English Holly.

"Come live with me," he called to his love, but she spurned him. And so with torch he set the longboat on fire, and from his spacious grounds he watched as the flames took down his ambitions.

the question, "Who am I now?"

Art called me back to herself. In spite of having spent a year at the Advertising Art Institute in Portland, Oregon years ago, and recording much of my life in sketches since then, I had done almost no art in Hawaii. Time to change that. I joined my mom in weekly portrait painting sessions at a friend's studio. Sometimes I drew and sometimes I modeled for a life drawing class. I learned to make stained glass windows in the old Odd Fellows Hall which was now Vashon Center for the Arts. All very soul-nourishing, but what about money for rent, etc.?

I trained as a bus driver for the Vashon schools. Ideally, this would give me time to work on my art between bus runs, while James was in school. Only one thing stopped me. Kids are noisy. I don't function well in a noisy environment. I had to let that opportunity go.

Then Davey came back from Arizona, all fired up about making his fortune in gemstones. He and Boone planned to mine their own stones, cut them, polish them, and sell them or make them into jewelry. Davey wanted me to be part of that dream. At first I told him "No," but he persisted and my thirst for adventure kicked in. I agreed to visit his fire opal claim in Oatman, Arizona.

Davey built a bed in my VW van and put together a traveling kitchen consisting of a cooler, a camp stove, and a wooden box for storing cookware and utensils. I baked granola and a batch of nutritious oatmeal cookies for the road trip. We bought vegetables and yogurt to put into the cooler and a few staples to store in the box with the cookware. I arranged for James to stay with my parents, and in mid-April, we left the green forests of Vashon for the desert cactus of Arizona.



Well, not exactly. Definitely, our visionary builder sold out, and quit the scene, for whatever cause.

All became grounds for a local elite, and gay, old times, with one fatal oversight in their carefree world, the un-spannable distance between the mansion and the nearest fire hydrant. Even so, word of the flaming longboat still gets bandied about, evidence hard to ignite or ignore, a flashpoint for shattered dreams, if ever there was one. In any case, heartbreak for sure.

Come the mid-sixties, a shock to our hidden Wonderland: a small, plywood cabin appeared overnight at the edge of the yawning basement. Our trusteeship had been usurped. My brother told me he and his Ronson lighter buddy had looked inside and seen a sword and a human skull in a glass case on the floor, but I never dared to approach and confirm.

Yet now and then, I'd find myself following the trail along the overgrown lane, edging my way, under camouflage, near that now lost world. Never were there cars about, or any sign of life about the cabin. Come '67 or '68, though, a most visible and colorful presence would take up residence, there, with camper trucks on the outer grounds. The hippies would arrive on Vashon.

The Vashon Island News-Record, Jan. 19, 1950 edition, covers the destruction of The Falcon's Nest: "Fire Destroys One Of Island's Show Places."



A Cheap PC is Good Enough

By Andy Valencia

Yes, everything is up-up-up, as in prices: your cafe drink, groceries, ferry fares. Let’s not even talk about gas. Will we actually reach \$8 per gallon? And in technology ...

- RAM prices up 3x, maybe 4x, or even more
- Disks, more than 2x
- SSD, more like 3x

And now the word is coming out that you’ll need to throw it all out and get an AI PC?!

There’s a famous line from the old 1983 movie “WarGames,” where the AI concludes “The only winning move is not to play.” The AI was thinking about global thermonuclear warfare, but what the tech industry is doing to your paycheck feels like a kind of warfare, too.

If the pain in the wallet isn’t enough to motivate you, consider literal mountains of e-waste generated each year. Before you say “e-waste recycling,” note that the state of the art is less than 20% of the materials can even possibly be recycled. Extending the service life of existing devices is – by far – the greenest option.

You need a PC, and you’d like it to be green and cheap. The best option these days is a blast from the past – one of those big tower PCs. You know, that big metal box on your desk, or perhaps the even bigger box that you put on the ground beside

your desk. Isn’t it crazy that the big chunk of plastic and metal is the green option?

In the modern world, everybody’s fixated on buying wafer-thin devices which mostly break the \$1,000 barrier. Because of modern tastes, desktop and tower PC’s have completely fallen out of favor, and can be had for a song. A Lenovo IdeaCentre often sells for less than \$100, with free delivery. That’s a full PC with disk and RAM, ready to get to work once you plug in mouse, keyboard, and monitor. I suggest installing Linux on it, of course – please check out my June 2026 article.

But a low price tag is just the start. When that exquisitely thin engineering miracle breaks in any way, you throw it out. Or, often, you send it to the manufacturer so they can “fix” it. Which, mostly, means they send you a new one. What do they do with the old, broken one? The reality of e-waste will give you the likely answer.

On the other hand, if you spill coffee on the keyboard of your tower PC, you unplug it from the USB port, and plug in a replacement keyboard. You probably don’t even have to reboot! If the monitor goes, you can replace just that part. Same for the mouse, the RAM, the disk, even the motherboard. All the parts are designed to be removed and replaced when needed.

You probably already have the

USB keyboard and mouse; just look in your hall closet. You might also have the monitor, though you need to make sure it has the type of connection needed by your PC. That’ll be either SVGA or HDMI, and many monitors offer both kinds of connections. Don’t forget to dig out the monitor’s video and power cables.

For sound, many HDMI monitors have speakers built right in. If not, you can buy powered external speakers for less than \$50. The ones we bought 20 years ago are still going strong – we plug a phone into them to provide music in the kitchen.

For the internet connection, I suggest putting your PC near the cable modem and using an ethernet cable. WiFi is fine, and many desktop PCs have built-in WiFi. But ethernet is cheap, fast, and reliable. Again, you can probably find an ethernet cable in the dusty corner of a drawer or closet.

Checking today’s prices as I type this, here’s what I’d spend for a full PC from scratch:

- i5 refurb Lenovo ThinkCentre with 8GB RAM and 240GB disk, \$90
- 19” refurb VGA monitor, \$40
- VGA cable, \$2.50
- New / open box Logitech PC sound system, \$35
- USB keyboard and mouse package, \$13
- Ethernet cable 6’, \$5
- Backup USB drive, \$30

What’s that \$30 for a backup drive? That’s your safety net. No matter what you spend on your PC,

eventually disaster will strike. On that dark day, your PC will fail you – hardware failure, some internet villain wipes it, or it’s plain old stolen. Making a backup, and keeping it up to date, will suddenly be the best \$30 you ever spent. Keep it in a different room, or better yet, at a trusted friend’s house. If somebody breaks in and takes all your tech (or there’s a fire), you’ll be glad your backed up data is somewhere else.

Your total? \$215.50. With tax, that’s \$1,215.50. Just kidding, but it’ll add quite a bit. I can’t help you with that.

Next month, I’ll finish this series talking about laptops. You get far less for your dollar, and they’re much harder to repair when they break. Still, there are times when you need a travel-friendly option, and there are some interesting green and cost-effective alternatives to the usual expensive, throw-away options.

Edible Bouquet

Are you curious about Olga’s bouquet (See photo, front page)? We were!

Olga shares, “My friend just turned 70, so I wanted to do something special. I absolutely love making things by hand – I’m very artsy and crafty. So if you ever need an edible bouquet, feel free to reach out to me!” Talk about a unique gift for a Vashon friend or family member!

Olga says, “I’d be more than happy to help create something special for them.”

Contact Olga at
Olga.monteg@gmail.com

Why Share My Story?

Continued from Front Page

Minimal side effects. That means I can start living a semi-normal life again. One of the first things I have started to do is bake, which I love.

Just last weekend, I made a chocolate cream pie, a fresh peach cobbler, and two black-bottom banana cream pies. I made Jake his favorite Russian tea cakes. Did this baking without running my energy tank empty. The nurses say if my tank gets down to 50%, I need to take a break and let it fill up again before going back at it. Another life lesson.

I also want to get back to making my Thursday night family dinners. Those have been so missed for the past few months. But I am starting to think about menus and dates. Do I want to make barbecued ribs and eat on the beautiful new deck? Baked ham with potato salad? Roast beef with mashed potatoes and gravy? Have Paul make his famous fried rice on the flattop?

My grandson loves the family dinners. I think it is a great tradition. Everybody is so busy these days, but most can take a couple of hours on a Thursday night to sit down with family for conversation and a good meal.

Also thinking about having a few friends over now and again. My deck is a perfect place for a relaxed dinner. Found out a good friend from the pool and my cousin from Oregon have friends in common, so it would be fun to have them and their spouses over. Maybe Thai lettuce wraps and a Romaine, apple, and candied pecan salad. Fresh-squeezed lemonade on ice. Oh, and lemon squares for dessert. See? I’m in the planning phase.

You might notice I am a bit obsessed with food right now. Reason being that my mouth surgery has left me with low appetite and minimal taste buds. A piece of scapula bone was taken out and put in my jaw. A week in the hospital with a feeding tube didn’t help. Hoping the appetite won’t come completely back as I am enjoying losing some weight. But it is totally freaky to have minimal to no sense of taste. Most everything tastes like shredded cardboard.

I can taste a little salt and sweet, but not enough to be sure food is properly seasoned. The doctor said it might take six months for my taste to come back (it’s been six weeks since surgery), or it might never come back completely. Waiting game.

The bone graft site is on my left scapula. It’s an “X” shape with one leg missing that goes into my armpit. Twenty or so staples to close. It has been two months since surgery and the wound is almost closed. Maybe another week and a half then I can go back to the pool! It will take a lot of rehab to regain range of motion and strength.

Waiting, waiting, waiting. But I keep telling myself, this isn’t forever, this too shall pass and the long-term prognosis is good.

Another thing on my “once I’m better” list is spending a week or so on the Oregon coast. Seems like everybody and their dog are going on vacations or are having travel adventures. My daughter and granddaughter hauled five racehorses from Tampa, Florida to Shakopee, Minnesota a few weeks ago. Family and friends have tons of travel plans: Jeep rock climbing in Arizona, a trip to Rome and cruising the Mediterranean, trips to Japan and Scotland, a bunch of motorcycle excursions, and some folks are always planning their next cruise.

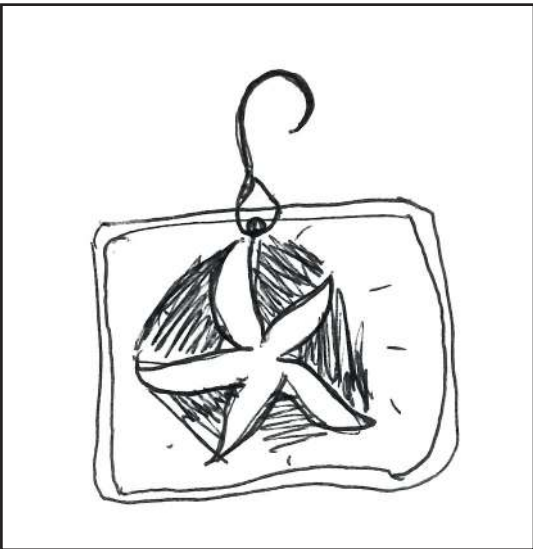
I just want a week at the beach. It will happen. I have to be patient.

My life for the next few weeks will be filled with physical therapy, occupational therapy, visiting nurse appointments and trips to Swedish for immunotherapy infusions. I can deal with that schedule in order to be able to say at the end of the year, “I am 99.9% cured.” At least, that is what the doctors tell me we are on track to achieve.

Vashon! Do you have a great story that you want to share with The Loop? We want to hear from you!



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Lost and Found – Illustration by Rocky (Donna) Liberty

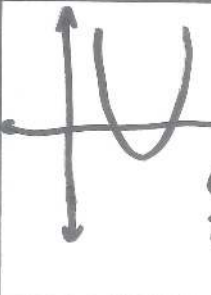
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Finding God in Nature ... and People

By Mike Ivaska

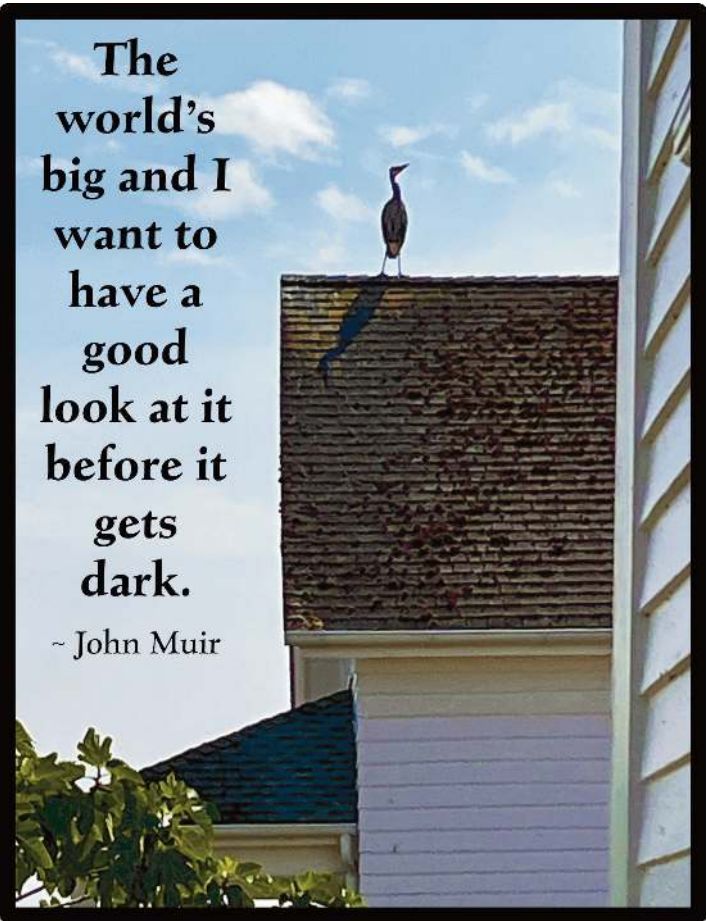
One of the things I really appreciate about life on Vashon is how quickly we can immerse ourselves in nature here. Within ten minutes of walking or driving, depending on where you live, a trailhead awaits. You don't even have to have anything resembling survival skills – which, for me, is particularly good news. Just don't fall down and you'll be fine.

Predatory animals are rare on Vashon. For most of my life here, the most ferocious wild beast was a raccoon. Sometimes, we'd get a confused bear who swam over from the Peninsula, but this tended to create more fascination than fear. More recently, we've had a cougar or two. And now coyotes sometimes threaten our pets. But nature on Vashon is still pretty innocuous. Our Island Facebook groups are far more vicious than most anything you'd run across in the woods.

As an introvert, when I'm looking for peace – or when I'm looking for God – I tend to go outside. My daily walk does more for my soul than it does for my body, and the first words that tend to pop into my head at that first deep breath of fresh air are, "Thank you, God."



Photograph by Claudia Hollander-Lucas



Llaughing Llamas Chronicles

By Daniel Hooker

From Shannon on my Facebook page:

Freddie Mercury, Venus Williams, and Bruno Mars walk into a bar.

They didn't planet that way.

~

Recently, I've been eating so much pickled garlic to get over a summer cold that It's had a side effect: those people who have been flapping around and driving me batty have left the Island.

I wonder what's going to happen when I start washing my face with witch hazel for a spell?

~

Every morning I walk my cow through the vineyards.

Yup. I herd it through the grape vines.

~

At the Food Bank, I'm telling a couple of jokes, and they're saying something about Taylor Farms and their lettuce and stuff.

Oh yeah. Taylor Farms are flying off the shelves – they're having a run on it.

~

Q: What's the best part of a waffle?

A: It's clearly the "w," because without the "w," it's just "affle."

~

From Bob at Ace Hardware:

Did you hear about the lawyer who gave up law so he could start breeding dogs?

Yep, it's no wonder. He prefers boxers over briefs.

~

This isn't because I'm particularly pious, mind you. I'm a minister, yes. But a generally disappointing one for those who are looking for experts in piety. People who know me usually forget I'm a pastor after a while. Sometimes I forget, too. I'm not sure this is good, exactly. But, as they say, it is what it is.

No, the words pop into my head from somewhere subliminal. "This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength ...'" (Isaiah 30:15, NIV, emphasis added). There is healing in quiet. And strength. Refreshment. Restoration. What I'm often looking for when I pray, I find when I go for a walk.

But this raises the question: Am I really closer to God in a forest than I am sitting in a cafe? Am I experiencing God less when I'm paying my bills than when I am hearing the waves? That's actually a very limited picture of God, if you think about it. A God who can be chased away by electric lights and small talk is more of a god than a God.

No, as a believer in Jesus I am convinced God is everywhere. He even shows up in funny places like church.

A retired theology professor once wrote of a student he had. This student was young and newly married. He was training for the ministry and was

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Math Puzzle

By Anne Cotter Moses

Making Change

Anne asked the cashier for change for a dollar and she received 21 coins. How was this done?

See bottom right corner of Page 11 for the Solution



A few weeks ago, I woke up to the pitter-patter of raindrops, and went outside to cover some cardboard I'd just collected.

All of a sudden, all the hairs on my arms started tingling and standing up straight, so I went straight back inside. Lightning was striking all around me and was pretty loud. I looked on my phone app. Everywhere I looked in the Puget Sound, I could see the lightning strikes, but the center of the storm seemed to be right where I lived. It was 0.1 mile surrounding me, and I was the bullseye.

taking a class on "creation spirituality" from the professor. The class had spent the previous week discussing the phrase "image of God" out of Genesis. Excited and inspired by the discussions, this student began telling his wife on his way out the door, "I am going out to spend time in creation."

His wife knew he'd been working hard and so simply said, "Have a good time." But, day after day, the student would tell his wife, "I am going out to spend time in creation." After a while, his wife became worried.

"Shouldn't you be going back to class at some point? School is expensive, and you don't want to jeopardize your grade."

"I've been going to class every day," the student replied.

"What do you mean?" his wife asked, "I thought you've been going out to spend time in creation."

"I have been. Every day. On the bus. At the coffee shop. At the school. There are people everywhere. And each one of them is created by God."

It's a cute story, of course. And true, as far as I know. But this story does raise a point. When we think of creation and being close to God, we tend to think of trees and not people, of quiet solitude rather than casual conversation. Nature and God are one thing. People and the city bus are another. But God is everywhere. Even among people. Even in funny places like church.

Obviously, part of the reason we feel closer to God in nature than in town is because God made nature but people made the town. Nature is free. Town feels rule-bound and constrained. Everything in the forest sort of works together, symbiotically. Town can have the feel of competition and imposed order (or attempts thereat, at least). Again, sadly, kind of like church (sometimes).

But to say that God isn't at work among people is a very limited picture of God. To say that God, who made people, doesn't think people-in-community is worth all the risk, noise, and trouble, is a very limited picture of God.

Nature, in most places of the world, is both dangerous and beautiful. On Vashon, it's mostly just beautiful. People, in all places, are both terrible and lovely. *Simul justus et peccator*, Martin Luther once wrote. Righteous and sinful all at once. God is at work in the black bear and the pine cone. But God is at work in humanity, too.

We don't see things
as they are.

we see them as we are.
~ Anaïs Nin

It was quite a workout. Now I'm Thor.

~

At the store, a young man was vacuuming.

I told him, "Right now, your job sucks."

Then I said: "I'm sorry. I can't help myself. Sometimes my sense of humor is a little ought-istic. Sometimes I ought to, sometimes I ought not to."

Financial Independence

By Stephen Buller

For better or worse, money plays a big role in our lives – I would argue for better, as the concept of money was a brilliant invention that allowed individuals to store the value of their efforts and exchange the fruits of their labor to better their standard of living.

The term financial independence can be a little misleading because it doesn’t mean an absence of money in your life but rather abundance of it. Specifically, it refers to an individual reaching a point where his “passive” income covers all his living expenses. The need to work becomes a thing of the past, and that quarter of his life opens up to new possibilities.

Maybe it should be called work independence.

The author of “Rich Dad Poor Dad,” Robert Kiyosaki gets to the heart of this when he says, “The rich don’t work for money.” A confusing statement until you learn what he means. The rich work for assets, the distinction being that money is gone once spent, but assets generate more money over time. With an asset, your money works for you.

As an accountant, I like Kiyosaki’s definition of an asset more than the academic one – an asset is something that puts money in your pocket: Stocks pay dividends; bonds pay interest, businesses earn income, real estate generates rental income, intellectual property can be licensed ...

There is risk inherent in any asset, and “passive” doesn’t necessarily mean it requires zero hours of your time to manage. But acquiring assets over a life of work is a much more appealing means for retirement to me than hoping my social security check will clear (and purchase something meaningful) when I’m 65.

That’s where the independence comes from, a reliance on the assets you’ve accumulated over your life instead of the whims of government, the winds of change, and the charity of your fellow man.

Island Resilience

How do you get there? Assuming you’re starting from scratch, you must first live within your means, earning more from your labor than you spend on essentials. (This is no small task today.) You invest your excess income, and over time your assets grow.

Which assets do you choose to invest in? This will vary greatly depending on your skills and knowledge, and diversification is also important. Instead of pitching investments, I’ll simply draw a distinction between “income” of any kind and “capital gains.”

If you bought SpaceX stock at the initial public offering, you’re probably hoping the stock will be worth much more in the future, so you can sell at a gain. The problem is that’s uncertain, both in likelihood and timeline. In general, price appreciation is guaranteed through inflation, yet unpredictable for many other reasons.

A dividend, on the other hand, from a company like Proctor & Gamble is all but guaranteed. It may fluctuate some, but unless the 180-year-old consumer staples company goes out of business, that stock will keep paying dividends. Similarly, unless the United States government defaults on its debt, treasuries will continue to pay interest.

In the wake of the Great Financial Crisis, the FIRE movement gained a lot of traction. This stands for Financial Independence Retire Early and taught people to live frugally and invest aggressively to build a nest egg of 25x their annual expenses, suggesting the passive income from this portfolio would sustain one’s lifestyle in retirement.

My two major concerns with this movement are 1) as someone who worked many hours early in my career, I would argue there is much life to be experienced in your younger years other than slaving away for some abstract retirement, and 2)



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the movement seems to rely heavily on traditional investment portfolios which lack transparency and control by the individual.

As an entrepreneur, my favorite asset is obvious: Leverage your skill and knowledge to create a product or service others value, and build a business, an asset which you can direct and control, put as many hours into as you see value in, and bring your genius to the world.

Few people will ever reach complete financial independence, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try. Living below your means and building assets in your younger years means you can at least slow down as you age, and that’s something we should all plan for.

Generational Sourdough – Beyond Loaves

By Jane Valencia

Whether purchased, gifted, or “caught” with flour and water, a well-tended sourdough starter burgeons with life. A keeper of sourdough often gets into a creative rhythm with using it, making breads for family and friends, and even distributing the starter itself. In times past, this culture of sharing sourdough had stronger significance – that of maintaining survival – and was not just passed along but handed down.

Literally “all in the family,” Caelan Angel’s sourdough starter has been in his for at least five generations.

“My grandmother’s grandma was the first person that I know had it. It might go back further than that, but that’s what I’ve heard. It’s been passed down through the generations and distributed to all the different family units, and so we all have pieces of it that we care for. And if one of ours dies, we just get a little bit and revive it.”

Caelan’s family is strongly connected, meeting up during the holidays and other family events. Caelan finds that the sourdough they share is a material expression of this relational connection. “This shows up during the holidays as sourdough bread that’s baked from this family sourdough. It also serves as a kind of check-in point, ‘how’s your sourdough going?’”

Caelan feeds his sourdough every Sunday. “I’ve definitely killed the dough a couple of times.”

His young son loves pancakes made with the sourdough, so will check in about it, “Is it time to feed the dough yet?”

This simple home tradition of making delicious pancakes is a rhythmic touchpoint of connection between the two of them, as well as to their extended family and with the sourdough itself.

Caelan notes that tending and sharing sourdough, and passing it down, was a common practice during earlier times. His dad’s family was part of that. “That whole side of the family are great cooks, and traditional family meals are really important.”

And for him, this connection extends to ancestral heritage in very physical ways.

“More and more science is coming out about how much our gut runs who we are – how we think, how we’re feeling, our health, our pheromones, and communication with other people, and also how much the gut shapes our own bodies. You are what you eat.

“And so to have this relationship with the same culture that has evolved with our family and we’ve evolved with them through time feels like a really tangible connection to this lineage of my DNA and who I am.”

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Fishing at High Tide – Illustration by Suzanna Leigh

Continued on Page 9

Should We Talk About Trans Issues?

Yes, and Here's Why ...

By March Twisdale

Years ago, a very smart friend of mine said the following: "Puberty blockers are perfectly safe. All you're doing is hitting the pause button on puberty. When you go off them, everything resumes like normal. No harm done."

I remember that moment. Where I was standing. The weather. The time of day. The energy behind my friend's words. And my awareness that she was not open to hearing anything that might contradict that comfortable fiction. I chose to simply listen. But, what I believed then, and still do, is that manipulating hormones does not "pause" this all-important stage of our physical development.

Puberty is the crucible of biological change through which we become fully capable of reproduction, and there is a predetermined and perfect time for it to occur. Whereas life has intrinsic value in the eyes of God, Mother Nature is laser-focused on the continuation of the species. There is nothing natural (or safe) about trying to dodge millions of years of evolution.

Why did I keep my peace? (1) I recognize a closed door when I see one, and (2) I am an American.

America is a land enriched by diversity, nourished by individual choice, and honest enough to accept the imperfection of human nature. This is why we have laws primarily protecting us from harm versus laws that force us to do or say or act in a particular way. It's why "language-controlling laws" in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom are anathema to our American way of life.

Unfortunately, the peace did not last.

One day, my friend said, "If you ever write about trans issues, our friendship will be over." Again, I remember where I was standing, the weather, the sounds of the farm around us, and the time of day. And my awareness that our friendship was over.

A relationship where one is told what they can and cannot speak or write about is one with a broken power dynamic. Controlling what people can say, privately or in public, destroys the foundation of relationships, community, and our nation.

On Vashon, our foundation is crumbling under the pressure of issues so HOT, no one will touch them. The strain of keeping our silence and inhibiting our thoughts, is palpable. My 2026 article series is meant to help us break free, because NO ONE should be silenced or attempt to silence

another.

But, the problem goes beyond people silencing people. Entire narratives are driven by media, advocacy groups, and politicians who control and exacerbate the debate landscape around wedge issues. It's a form of programming that's very effective.

When a new "hot topic" is presented, it arrives with scripted talking points, carefully drawn battle lines, and clear teams. Almost overnight, we take our position as "approved allies," armed with arguments spoon-fed to us. NOT our own thoughts. NOT our unique ideas. NOT our personal experiences. Why? Because we're not meant to contribute. We are meant to be pawns and obedient foot soldiers.

Does this bother you? It bothers me! I have my own thoughts, thank you very much. And today, I'm going to share a few of them.

Female-only spaces have traditionally been safe havens. They are secure, protected spaces where one group of humans (biological males) are not permitted. Why? Because when a woman disrobes, she becomes more sexually vulnerable. To destroy female-only spaces in the public sphere is to eliminate safety beyond the home.

I am especially sensitive to the needs of Muslim women, for whom "males in traditional female spaces" is absolutely forbidden. That's 4.5 million American Muslim families impacted, if their wives, mothers, and daughters can no longer utilize public restrooms, belong to gyms, compete in sports or enjoy guaranteed female-only venues or events.

If you're the type to insist "they should get over it, because there's nothing to worry about," please pause and think. There are four categories of men seeking access to female-only spaces. (1) Biological males wishing to live as a woman. (2) The mentally ill. (3) Men with fetishes. (4) Sexual predators. We cannot know who is who, and no laws robbing women of female-only spaces acknowledges the FACT that they've opened the doors to all four categories.

It's 2026, and I would like to see some accountability on the part of men. Butch women feel comfortable in a women's restroom. Shouldn't effeminate and/or biological males living as women feel safe in biological male-only spaces? Maybe this is your invitation to expand acceptable behavior norms for biological males? Because that's what a "trans woman" is: a biological male living, feeling, thinking, and being a certain way. Shouldn't biological male-only spaces be safe and comfortable for all biological males?

Lastly, sports competition between biological



males and females is wrong. In physically competitive sports, where biology confers intrinsic advantage and winning matters, males should not be permitted to compete against females. This is why the International Olympic Committee should be ashamed of their abject failure to protect female athletes at the Paris Olympics, and we should all be heartened by the new policy (announced March 26, 2026) restricting eligibility for female Olympic events to biological females only.

Regarding Washington Initiative IL26-638, opponents say, "There are so few biological males competing as females, it's a non-issue."

How dare anyone diminish the experience of young women and girls ousted from the winner's podium by biological male competitors? We should be asking, "If so few biological males are competing against thousands and thousands of female players, why do they keep showing up on the victory podium?" Around the globe, we see biological males dominating women's and girl's sporting events. This isn't imaginary. It is proof that biology matters in physical sports.

No one is trying to police how athletes live on their own time. There's nothing wrong with a biological male acting, dressing, and claiming to be a woman, even while competing in school sports, community sports, or at the Olympic level. But you must do so while competing against other biological males.

You cannot race against women, in the water or on the ground, and you cannot beat women up in the boxing ring. Period. It's not safe. It's not fair. It's not acceptable.

Editor's Note: Washington Initiative IL-26-638 begins: "AN ACT relating to defending equity in interscholastic sports," and concerns restricting students it defines as biologically male from competing in K-12 athletics that are "intended exclusively for female students."

To read the full text of the Initiative, go to <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary>. Under "Search bills by," select Initiative. Under "Number", enter: 26638. Under Bill Documents, click the link for Initiative IL 26-638.

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Cafe Art

For several years artist Anne Cotter Moses and I met regularly to make quick paintings in Island spaces. This one was made just outside Cafe Luna.
Illustration by Jane Valencia

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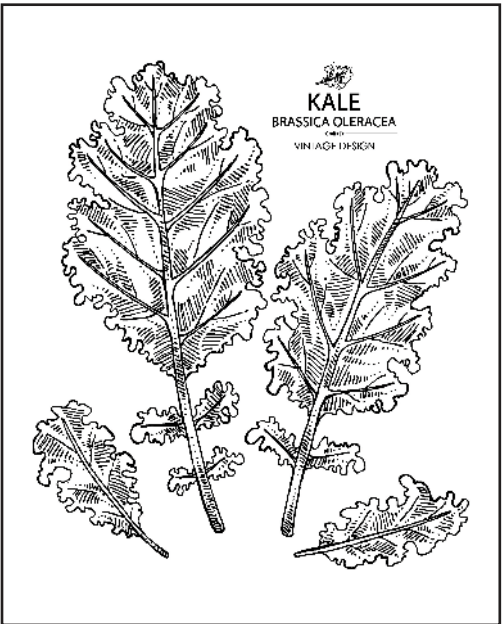
Kale Slaw!

By Caitlin Rothermel

This is a tasty, colorful, and consistently popular summer salad option that can be served as a side dish alongside anything, or as a light main dish. I have made it for years and brought it to every type of gathering – even non-salad and/or non-kale people like this dish. I call it “slaw” because it’s versatile like coleslaw, albeit more complex.

You can also make this salad for yourself and have food for a few days, because it stores that well.

No specific measurements are provided; part of the fun is figuring out the blend and ingredient proportions that work for you. However, the kale and purple cabbage should take up the majority of space. After that, mix and match to determine how you like it best.



There is a lot of chopping and prep work, so the best value for your time is to prepare in bulk and have leftovers.



Generational Sourdough

Continued from Page 7

cultural pillars – family gatherings, seasonal celebrations, etcetera – I still have. Creating new and remembering old practices can feel especially daunting. But I believe this generational sourdough culture provides a model we may extrapolate on to try and enrich our lives and our communities.”

Caelan describes this model.

“A sourdough starter is a wild culture that arises from the natural wild yeasts and amino acid bacterias, rather than the monoculture strains of yeast in bakers yeast. All you need to start one is unbleached flour and water, tended over a week or two. But to maintain a culture requires time and attention. I have killed mine many times over. Yet, through a decentralized network (my family) we have managed to maintain this community of micro-organisms through many generations.

“We as humans yearn for connection, we yearn to support each other. It is because of the social and economic structures we live in that it has become so difficult to maintain traditions that enliven our life and bring us deeper into community. I believe that like a sourdough starter, if given the simple raw ingredients, culture arises naturally and unbidden. Maintaining it is another thing.

“What might it look like to have a

community of people who support each other in material and emotional ways, so that when you stumble, have a hard week, or a family emergency, they can reach out and lift you up? Food is at the center of culture and community, a way to quite literally nourish and bring people together. How can we create a web of resiliency that weaves us closer together with our community?”

Caelan dreams of finding those people in his community who have interests and skills in relation to food, each contributing their specialty, what they love to work with.

“For me it might be sourdough, making bread, biscuits or even just giving it to a number of folks, ‘Here’s a sourdough starter,’ and building these tethers of community and dependence on your other community members.

“Someone might contribute yogurt, another greens and veggies. I can’t do it all, but this is something I can do and am excited about, and so I’ll do this and give it to my community, and I trust that others will do the same to their capacity. I think that that’s one of the ways that we can re-enrich community.”

I had suspected that when I approached Caelan regarding generational sourdough he would have much more to share in relation

Sourdough Pancake Recipe

Caelan describes his method of making sourdough pancakes, which does not use exact measurements.

“The night before making pancakes, I beef up the starter with about two and a half cups of flour and two cups of water, and then let it do its business overnight.

“In the morning, we’ll take a half cup out to return to the fridge as your starter. Mix that with some baking soda, some sugar – a tablespoon to taste, some oil, a pinch of salt, a little more flour – generally about a half cup to a cup – to get to the consistency I want.

“Heat your skillet on medium until butter sizzles. Add ¼ cup of batter to the skillet, flipping when bubbles show through the batter and pop. Enjoy with butter, syrup, fresh fruit, or whatever toppings you desire!

With two eggs: “I separate egg whites from the yokes. I beat up the egg whites and get them nice and fluffy, and combine all the ingredients. They’re really good. I like them because they got a little bit of that sour taste to them. Serve them with fresh fruit, or whatever you like.”

Kale Slaw!



- Ingredients**
- The list below is reflective of how much of each ingredient should be used. Use more of the items higher on the list and less of those lower on the list.
- Salad**
- Kale, chopped or ripped into small pieces (curly or lacinato kale are especially tasty, but any type will work; for a softer salad, remove the stems)
 - Purple cabbage, chopped into small pieces
 - Cilantro and / or parsley, chopped
 - Chopped pecans (other options: slivered almonds, pine nuts, tamari pumpkin seeds, and/or sunflower seeds)
 - Fresh mint leaves (can be made without these, but even better with)
 - Chopped dried cranberries (also works with raisins, dried cherries, and/or apricots)
 - Chopped or slivered carrots
- Dressing**
- For a large bowl of salad, make about 8-12 ounces of dressing. Use more or less to suit your taste.
- Olive oil (2 parts)
 - Balsamic vinegar (1 part)
 - One lemon or lime, zested and squeezed
 - Salt to taste (keep in mind you’ve already salted via the kale)
 - Dressing seasoning: This is your call. Use your favorite vinaigrette or a mixture of spices (eg, mustard salt, garlic, black pepper, tarragon, chives thyme, rosemary, paprika, dried onion, even a bit of sugar). [Caitlin’s note: I really enjoy the Penzey’s “Country French Vinaigrette” mix for this salad.]

- Directions**
- Chop the kale first and place in large bowl, then “massage” the kale. To do this, add a few spoons of olive oil plus about ½ tsp of salt to the kale, then gently mix and squeeze the mixture for 1-2 minutes. This process helps to break down the kale’s structure: this lets the dressing in and softens it taste – effectively getting rid of the barriers some people have to eating raw kale.
- Note:** If you have young children, they are usually very happy to help with the kale massaging step.
- Add the other salad ingredients and mix well. Pour and mix in the dressing gradually, until it looks and tastes good to you.
- Two Tips:**
1. Make a large salad: Refrigerated, the salad lasts for several days, and some say it gets even better after a day or two.
 2. Make it a meal: Serve over brown rice, quinoa, or pearl barley.

to it. When I mentioned this, he laughed.

“Sometimes I can kind of roll my eyes at myself because I do that in other situations, and people are like, ‘Okay, but we’re talking about sourdough.’

“No, It’s about changing the paradigm.

“And it makes it a lot more possible, too, because if I’m making bread, making yogurt, growing a garden – all of these have so much effort that goes into starting them, but producing more isn’t that much more work.

“Okay, I have to knead more dough, set more dough out to rise,

and work with longer baking times. But that is a vast difference in labor than maintaining all the other food-ways that I want me and my child to have in our lives.

“And so, let’s be smart about how we do this. And I think that creating food and giving services to your community is one of those ways of spreading the load and spreading the love.”

And to inspire and nourish the culture for doing so.

For details on how to start your own sourdough, visit vashonloop.com and read “Fresh – Yet Ancient – Bread” by Andy Valencia, published March 2026

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Animism, Hearing Loss, and the Power of Birdwatching

By Gabrielle Wildheart

I am the cliché of the midlife person who spontaneously develops an interest in birdwatching. I’ve been on the Merlin app for a few years now, but in the summer of my 39th year things got a bit more serious, and I graduated to E-bird. (If you know, you know.)

It’s no coincidence that people start birding around the same time their hormonal sleep patterns shift. For the first time in my life, I am actually awake early enough to hear the dawn chorus. I didn’t even know there was a dawn chorus three years ago.

Recently, the birds taught me something very important about my hearing.

As usual, I was awake early, lying in bed, cuddled with my sleeping husband and dog. I’ve been learning to recognize various birds by their songs, so I was listening to the avian soundscape outside the bedroom, challenging myself to identify as many as possible. *Robin ... spotted Towhee ... Swainson’s thrush ...*

I roll over, shifting my other ear to the pillow ... and suddenly the birds all go silent. I’ve learned that birds will cue changes in the environment. What is it? A hawk? Incoming storm? I lift my head to tune in deeper. With both ears raised off the bed, the birds resume their chatter.

I relax and drop my head back on the pillow. The birds immediately go silent. I realize something is wrong. Quickly, I wake Kevin –

Health Matters

“Babe – wake up! Can you say something? I think I can’t hear out of my left ear.”

With relief, I hear his groggy voice clearly. But a quick test by alternating a hand covering each ear confirms that I am unable to hear the birdsongs equally in both ears.

The next day, I go to a walk-in clinic, thinking they’ll clean out some wax and get my hearing back to normal. After a few tests, the doctor informs me that “Your earwax is fine, but your hearing is not.”

Sudden hearing loss is an emergency, requiring prompt attention and high-dose steroids. I had no idea, and am plunged into two days of ER visits, special tests, and strange medications. Finally, it’s confirmed that I have unexplained, mild hearing loss in my left ear. You’re 39,” the audiologist says. “But your hearing is like that of a 50-year-old.”

My ears have likely been declining for some time. It’s probably genetic. The loss is so subtle that I wouldn’t have picked up on it – had I not started bird-watching.

My interest in birding began around the time I seriously committed to an animist spiritual practice. Animism is the belief that all non-human entities are sacred and deserving of relational respect. For me, Animism extends to rocks, Claude AI, and my truck just as much as it does to animals. The past few years, I’ve been studying with several mentors on this path. In the fall, I’m hoping to be ordained as an inter-spiritual community minister with a focus on animism.

The practice of earth-based animism is a practice of curiosity. Every being in your environment is a potential buddy with wisdom to share. If you remember the popular computer game “Myst” from the 90s, animism feels a bit like that. The clues and stories are non-verbal. The discovery requires interaction, a spirit of play, and the constant search for new connections.

There’s a magical reciprocity in animate relationships that will lead you back to yourself. Because I started listening closely to the birds, I discovered my early hearing loss. An aging ear loses the highest-pitched sounds first. Birdsongs are one of the only natural sounds in that range, making them the first things we notice when we start losing our hearing.

Later that week, I sat in the office of a hearing specialist, surrounded by pamphlets on hearing aids and community groups for deaf people. He explained to me the link between hearing loss and dementia, depression, and heart disease.

“Hearing is the canary in the coal mine,” he says. “It’s an indicator of the holistic health of the whole body.” His bird metaphor is not lost on me. “You will want to monitor the subtle changes in your hearing and track the progression of loss throughout your life. Essentially, you’ll learn to be extra caring towards your ears and sensitive to what you can hear.”

I already know exactly how I will do this.

As I sit now on my porch writing this, I can hear them clearly: *Violet-green swallow... song sparrow ... pine siskin ...*

I will keep learning.

I will keep listening.



The Weeper at the Wake, Part 2

Continued from Back Page

But this woman, this face was not weeping or wailing. The woman’s wide, dark eyes stared through Caroline into the past, a certainty on her face, a contentment.

She’s happy where she is.

This was not a young woman swept away by fragility and sorrow. This was a woman who had lived a life, loved deeply, and left the world before it was ready to say goodbye to her. Perhaps she got sick. Perhaps it was an accident. But Caroline couldn’t see this face dying of a broken heart.

This woman was holding on to The Wake – to the world – with both hands.

Caroline thought of Zeke’s earnest expression, his serious tone.

“I owe her that much.”

It was love that had lingered in his voice, the unexpected note Caroline had briefly caught. In all the online ghost stories, rumors, and blog posts, the fisherman was never named.

Caroline lifted her head and looked out past the windshield, through the dark to the blackness of the sea, the lights of Port Townsend glittering in the distance. She could publish the photos. Maybe the money would be worth it, even if she did lose her job over it. Maybe it would be enough income for her to find something else, something better.

It might even be the making of her.

But when she looked back down at the camera, the ghostly woman gazed back at her. Through her.

She wasn’t weeping. She was right where she wanted to be, near the man she loved. She was at peace in the dark.

Caroline sighed, balled her hand into a fist, then relaxed.

You’re a soft touch, Caroline Phelan, she thought with a grim smile.

Then she deleted the photos, one by one.

S.E. Reid is a freelance writer, editor, and poet living on a patch of wooded wetland in the Pacific Northwest with her craftsman husband and her two big goofball dogs, Finn and Huck. You can find more of her work at <http://sereid.com>





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Aries (March 20-April 19)

From a spiritual perspective, the human ego presents a vast, illusory barrier to both self-understanding and to witnessing existence truly. Even under ideal conditions, it’s challenging to get past the ego’s defenses of fear, guilt and self-reproach. Neptune presents the opportunity to fuse with your spirit and your true inner-God nature, but it can also be a fountain of endless self-delusion and self-deception. With training, with discipline and self-awareness, it’s possible to transcend these challenges and pitfalls. The best way to do that on Earth is to get into your creative flow. The ego is a terrible master but it can be a great slave; give it something to do. Conditions this month raise the emotional honesty factor to the level of an urgent priority. Many forces, inner and outer, will be confusing and distracting you. Therefore, stay busy and emphasize what is both fulfilling and productive. If you’re an artist in any form, be grateful for that and use the gift you’ve been given.

Taurus (April 19-May 20)

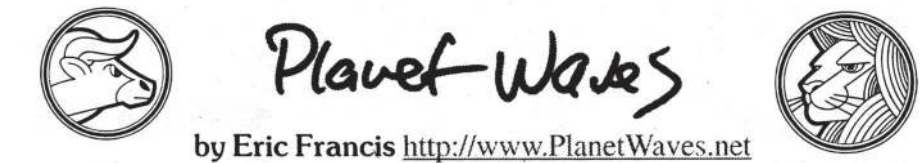
Though you may not realize it, it’s difficult for you to tell the difference between what you think and what you feel. There’s nothing like the mind of a Taurus when it’s running out of control – and this is usually an emotional phenomenon, not mental. It’s like drowning in your own flood waters, which may be your experience as Mars moves through a tense aspect to Neptune in the coming weeks. With Mars entering the picture, you may be more determined than ever to know yourself truly and have some lucid thoughts about your existence. The planetary setup does have some suggestions. Get out of your head and into direct physical experience. Your charts are nothing if not expressive right now, with Mercury, the Sun and Jupiter moving through your creative powerhouse sign Leo. To activate the full potential of this astrology, try to create your art and your experiences with a kind of vibrancy that may seem totally alien under current digital conditions.

Gemini (May 20-June 21)

You’re still getting accustomed to the legitimately strange conditions of Uranus and Sedna in your energy field – they’re radically shifting your sense of reality. You may be feeling pushed, pulled, stretched and disrupted – as if you cannot think or move fast enough to keep up with the pace of so-called reality. There is a temptation when reading your solar chart to focus on Uranus and his various jolts, but Sedna is the more significant feature. A total eclipse in your house of local affairs and communication describes an unusual opening or opportunity of some kind, a now-or-never kind of option. Sedna in your sign is calling on you to take your perception deeper and study life from beneath and behind. The truly meaningful information is coming from what is normally unseen and invisible. But first you must admit that such exists and train your awareness to notice your environment. Observe basic facts, even if they seem irrelevant at first. Then you will see who and what is driving the plot forward.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Later this month, Mars and Ceres enter your sign – perhaps the ultimate reminder that you are what you eat and that what you eat influences how you feel. You must be true to who you



are, especially under the influence of a solar eclipse on the 12th. Just ahead of that, Mars first enters your birth sign and will infuse you with energy and motivation. Because Mars will be meeting Neptune at a tense angle (a square), you will need to know what you want to accomplish, and direct your energy consciously toward that. Saturn in your 10th place Aries describes something useful, durable and that is really about who you are. With Ceres, avoid sugar highs and stick to food that you make yourself. Think carefully about what your grandparents ate and how they prepared it. There is also a message about resolving your persistent struggles. The deeper pain and true responsibility for life are passed down the maternal line, and it’s likely that your own challenges come from at least three generations behind you.

Leo (July 22-Aug. 23)

There are forces outside of your control that you have to contend with. One is represented by Pluto in your opposite sign Aquarius. You will need a whole new basis for figuring out who is your friend and who is not; for determining which of these humans is right, who among them is clueless, and who is aware of what is happening around them. Allies and collaborators will arrive from strange quarters and at unexpected moments, sometimes seeming to travel in time. A total eclipse of the Sun in your birth sign on Aug. 12 describes a calling and sense of inner truth that is unique to you alone. Don’t expect anyone to understand. Though people attempt to tattoo themselves into bold originality, the herd mentality has never been stronger. The solar eclipse will teach you that your greatest freedom comes from spiritual nudity and acting wholly on your instincts.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sep. 22)

The Leo solar eclipse of Aug. 12 occurs in the most sensitive angle of your chart, and may summon to life certain ghosts and ancestors of your distant past. They may be your self-concealed fears; they may be your hidden or denied desires; or you may discover the deep quest for life and vitality that you possess and yet often suppress. But the main event will be an eclipse of the Moon in your opposite sign Pisces at the end of the month. Occurrences coinciding with the time of this event will help you unravel your deepest neuroses and self-defeating tendencies. It is true that you had too much responsibility too young. It is probably true that you were neglected, or at least dissuaded from having some experience of joy as a child. Do not mistake the ideal lives that others seem to lead as reality. You are way too inclined to jealousy and envy, and will benefit from learning how to take others as an example of what is possible for you.

Libra (Sep. 22-Oct. 23)

Perhaps your most pressing life situation – it could even be a problem – is not understanding the effect that you have on others. You have two basic modes: you might think of one as broadcasting or emitting. This is you when you’re in your creative flow; you are the idea that you express. The

other is absorbing or consuming, where you can draw in the world around you and there seems to be no escape for either of you. There is a third space, which is emitting negativity; you try to minimize this and you will if you can stand back one inch from judging yourself. All of these psychic modes are associated with the galaxy M-87, also called NGC 4486 in your birth sign or ascendant. In early Libra, this is a permanent placement that is a defining feature of our nascent astrological era or what some call the Age of Aquarius. What complicates matters is that Neptune in Aries is now opposite this point, making it extremely difficult to “read the room” of existence. Therefore, only one thing matters, which is how you feel. Monitor that closely, and learn to make inner adjustments as necessary.

Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 22)

When you hear words such as “billion” or “trillion,” translate them into control, in a world that has been soaked and seized by the power and influence of digital technology and its seeming masters. In this environment, trust verges on impossible. People walk around the world with a shell on them, in defense of the permeable aura they wear in their online experiences. To maintain the illusion of self-control, everything (allegedly) must be scripted and predictable. All of this is why people are slowly going insane. It is why they are depressed, have given up any sense of potential and cannot see the future. A total eclipse next week in the most ambitious angle of your chart says you want more out of life. But before you decide that it’s fame, money and power, you might think carefully about what “more” really means.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 22)

It has never been easier to present oneself to the world as entirely self-centered and as some kind of spiritual master. One can get paid good money for claiming that existence is all about you and that you deserve to be worshipped. For many it is no more avoidable than getting swept up in a flash flood. You, however, would be wise to avoid this whole dimension of consciousness, action and media consumption. Train yourself to be repelled by those who make the world all about them; and never let yourself go there. With Virgo as the highest sign in your solar chart, the true nature of Sagittarius is about service. With Chiron as the figure depicted in the iconography of your birth sign, your highest calling is service. You are being called to take a wide perspective and to see over the edge of your own teacup. In doing so, you will find yourself living in a wider world with the satisfaction of knowing you are a very small part of the solution.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 20)

If it’s true that you’re the wealth manager of the cosmic scheme, you must be pretty busy right now. To make the most of your gifts, it’s essential that you focus on flow and not concentration of resources. Once the flow is gone, you are living in the future and not in the present, where your attention is needed. Aspects over the next three weeks reveal an abundance of available resources and

return on past investments. An eclipse of the Sun in your house of shared resources will emphasize that a good use of your financial talent is to assist others when needed. This would be an excellent time to do a kind of toxicity audit and get every chemical but soap and minimal laundry products out of your space. While time is progressing slowly within your personal space, you need at least one dimension of your life where time moves quickly. You need a fast lane. While it’s your nature to avoid technology for its own sake, make sure that no part of your work setup holds you back; to be happy, what you do on professional time must be exciting and a little weird.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 19)

Next week’s eclipse of the Sun in your opposite sign Leo will be a bellwether of your relationships, and represents a significant shift in your environment. Count on change and take advantage of its positive results. The important distinction to make overall is between need and desire. Your best encounters with others will be born of preference, desire and shared happiness. If the planets have one other bit of wisdom for you over the next few weeks, it’s to limit your energy output. This should happen mostly through efficiency and also by knowing when you’re putting so much energy into something that you reach a point of either exhaustion or diminishing returns. Play a game and see how much you can get done with the minimal expenditure of time and effort. How much includes how well, and quality must be your primary focus over speed and volume. Ask sincerely for others to assist you and you will have the help that you need.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)

A rare combination of factors in Leo, including a total eclipse of the Sun plus the presence of Mercury and Jupiter, is about how productive your work life can be. If you’ve been stuck or struggling to make necessary changes or improvements in your day-to-day work life, now is the time. You can let go of old habits and patterns and rapidly expand into the space and energy they vacate. An eclipse of the Moon will happen in your birth sign at month end. This is your help letting go of sticky emotional patterns. Think of the eclipse as solvent for your personality – the wholesome kind, like Dr. Bronner’s soap and warm water, or maybe spending some time in a salt water jacuzzi. If you can get to the ocean, do it. Otherwise you might get an extended recording of waves on the shore and leave it playing at a low volume in your environment, which needs to be kept as tidy as a beach house the first night you arrive.

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Math Puzzle Solution
By Anne Cotter Moses

One possible solution:
One quarter, 3 dimes, 7 nickels,
and 10 pennies

News You May Have Missed



- **A new anti-AI film society**
- **120 ingredients in your chicken sandwich**
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Happy Birthday, Marj!
Marj Watkins, the Loop’s “Island Epicure,” is 102 years old.



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In July issue's "With Wand and Shawl: the Investiture of Vashon's New Co-Poets Laureate," we welcomed Iris Spring and C. Hunter Davis into this shared role. Please enjoy a poem by C. Hunter Davis.

Bars Of Soap

When summer ended my mother put
the bars of soap in a tin
so we wouldn’t be pestered by
ants and mice.
All winter long when the summer place
lay in sweet damp comfort of
rotting leaves and gentle moss,
would ants and mice
be showering with our soap
washing paws or spindly legs
in puddles
sudsing fur or tiny bodies
with white bars of soap?
They would be perfumed with bouquet freshness.
I wondered why we could not be that generous.

~ C. Hunter Davis, Vashon Poet Laureate

The Weeper at the Wake, Part 2

By S.E. Reid

With its own "strange, hidden corners," Ferris Island, is similar in many ways to what we Islanders speak of as our own "Old Vashon." For more Ferris Island tales, visit: <http://talebones.substack.com>.

Did you miss Part 1 of this story? Read it online at vashonloop.com.

The barman glowered down at her, outranking her by at least a foot and a half, regarding her with sullen irritation.

“You,” he said, clearly trying to keep his voice down. “I know you. You’re that one from the *Chronicle*. That journalist.”

He spat the word; it was not a compliment.

Caroline tried to force a disarming smile. “I thought the bathrooms were down there. My mistake.”

But Zeke’s eyes flicked down to the camera, which was not fully hidden inside Caroline’s purse.

“Do you regularly bring fancy cameras when you go drinking?”

Caroline shrugged. “I’m doing a story on historic Ferris Island taverns. I could include a photo of you, if you want.”

But Zeke was unmoved. “Did you see her?” he asked.

“I have no idea what you mean.”

“Of course you do,” he said. “You sharks are always trying to get a glimpse of her. For that matter, how would the *Chronicle* feel about you ghost-hunting on the side?”

Caroline swallowed, but she kept her poker face. That was all she needed; her editor already had her on notice for indulging in this stuff. He was the humorless type, and the paranormal fell neatly outside his strict boundaries for serious journalism.

If he found out, there was a good chance her time at the *Port Salish Chronicle* would be well and truly over.

“I’m sorry, truly. It was just a misunderstanding,” she said, trying to push past him. Instead, he rested a giant hand on her arm. She expected a grab, but instead his touch was heavy, yet gentle.

“If you have any decency, you’ll delete those photos,” he said.

“And why’s that?”

“Because she’s been through enough,” Zeke replied, his face unmistakably softening. “Because she ought to be left alone. Because it would be the kind thing to do. Do you need any other reasons?”

Caroline sighed. It was tough to feel any sympathy for a ghost. Besides, those pictures were gold dust.

“What’s it to you, anyway?” she asked. “You’re

thinking about this all wrong. When I publish these photos, your bar will be a ghost-hunting destination for people all over the region, maybe even the country. Is The Wake too good for the paranormal business? I’ve heard the money is unreal.”

Zeke let his hand drop from Caroline’s arm. His icy blue eyes were full of pain.

“She deserves peace,” he said. “I ... I owe her that much.”

Caroline caught the hint of something in his tone, something unexpected. Her heart squeezed, but she hardly knew why. She had to get out of this place; the crowded heat, the smell of body odor and stale nicotine, the raucous bar-goers singing along to “Once In A Lifetime” were all starting to make her head throb.

“Tell you what,” she said. “You don’t breathe a word of this to anyone at the *Chronicle*, and I’ll delete the photos. Deal?”

Zeke gazed at her for a moment, as though taking the measure of her. He was old enough and sea-savvy enough not to trust a seemingly smooth tide without question.

But either he realized he didn’t have an option, or he couldn’t think of any other arguments, because he nodded. “It’s a deal.”

He stood aside, and without another word, Caroline shouldered past him, making sure that Scully was tucked safely the rest of the way into her bag. She pushed through the crowd and out into the cold air off the Port Salish harbor, not pausing for breath until she reached her car, slipping into the driver’s seat and locking the door behind her.

Caroline breathed deeply, her hand on her heart, willing herself to relax.

Finally, when her breathing slowed and her heartbeat calmed, Caroline pulled Scully out of her purse and turned the camera on. Then she flipped back through the photos.

The camera had worked its magic again, and the photos were incredible. As clear as they could be in the gloomy cellar, depicting a ghostly woman standing beside the kegs, her long dark hair pooling around her shoulders, her wide eyes staring straight down the lens.

“Hello, beautiful,” Caroline murmured. Scully had caught apparitions before, but these were absolute dynamite. According to her informant, paranormal bloggers and investigation teams would pay top dollar for this kind of thing. It was almost worth pissing off her editor for. In fact, it might even be the making of her.

Caroline flipped through the photos over and over again, amazed at the clarity. But the longer she stared into the ghost’s eyes, a persistent thought nagged at her.

She’s not weeping.

In all the stories she had read online about the Weeper at the Wake, they all repeated the same sad tale: a wailing woman, so bereft that her fisherman

Global Warming: No Such Thing

The temperatures in Europe broke records yesterday for the third straight year.

The news reported a three-year-old locked himself in the family car and died.

His Dad was gardening.
His Mother was napping.
Whose fault could this possibly be?

~ Laura C. Lipmann

Laura C. Lippman is a retired family practice physician and poet. Her two collections of poetry, The Catastrophist’s Daughter and My Radioactive Heart have just been released by Bookhouse Publishers. They can be ordered through your local bookstore or through her website. Her work was also included in Jeanie Okimoto’s collection of Vashon poets’ work, Grief Age Love, Poems for the Autumn Years

lover had shipped out to sea that she died, her soul trapped in the cellar of The Fishmaid’s Wake forever, grieving.

It was typical ghost story stuff, the kind Caroline usually rolled her eyes at: women who are so fragile that they die because they can’t handle being alone for a few months. Immortalized for the rest of local history as an eternal mourner. The clue was in the name.

Continued on Page 10



It’s no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.



~ Lewis Carroll
 (“Alice in Wonderland”)