WHEN HOLIDAY SHOPPING WAS FUN

by Olive Tubbs Chendali

Halloween has barely passed when stores, newspaper ads and the general public become obsessed with the ritual of Holiday gift-giving. All else is on hold while we dash from one announced "bargain" to another! Thanksgiving is almost lost in the frenzy. The muttering and complaining grows louder as the calendar moves along, but we dutifully persevere in performing our part in promoting the Nation's economy! Time was once, however, when Holiday gift giving was not as frenzied a time of year. We had time throughout the year to listen to the "wish lists" making mental notes for the Holidays ahead. In addition, it took time for Grandmothers to make a sweater or an afghan or a long-to-be-cherished quilt. Father stole clandestine moments in the cellar or workshop building Mother the bookshelf for which she had been yearning. Precious pennies were hoarded from jobs and errands performed for neighbors and relatives and these were juggled mentally many times to cover our gifts.

From the time of primary grades, teachers helped with needlecases and pin cushions for Mothers and decorated match books for Dad, and most homes were witness to the progress in our talents with cross-stitched pieces and book shelves and magazine racks from sewing and woodworking classes.

continued on page 4

Educational Signs on the Niantic Bay Boardwalk:

$35,000-Foundation Donations

Donations through the Decades - The East Lyme Public Trust Foundation - by June Hoye

People who walk the Niantic Bay Boardwalk for the first time are always engrossed with reading the outstanding educational signs. What a treat to read titles such as “Where Rivers Meet the Sea”, “The Nehantics”, and “Shellfish”. People are fascinated with this story of life that enfolds with these signs.

When the Foundation began its work in the 90’s, one of the key goals of the East Lyme Public Trust Foundation was to have an educational component to the Boardwalk. Once it seemed clear that the Boardwalk would become a reality, the Foundation immediately set to work to obtain a grant that would help finance 16 educational signs to be placed strategically on the Boardwalk.

After many years of work, in 2005, the Foundation was pleased to report the completion of the Design and Installation of the Educational Signs on the Niantic Bay Boardwalk. In compliance with Long Island Sound License Plate Project Grant (Niantic Bay Overlook Signage) Identification No. P.S. 2003-30276, the Foundation used a grant of $25,000 from the DEP to hire a consultant who worked with artists to produce the signs and to partially cover the cost of installation.

Their choice of topics deftly blended history, geology, nature, and home-town lore. The artists who ably worked on this project were Larry C. Ayer, Daniel Price, Peggy Price, Susan Siegel, and Susan Stone. The signage was produced by EHS Educational, LLC, Niantic.

In addition, in 2005, the East Lyme Public Trust Foundation donated $10,000 to help with the cost of manufacturing, mounting, and installing the signs. A summary of the 16 educational signs plus two entrance signs is available on the foundation's website at publictrustfoundation.org/niantic-boardwalk-educational-signs

Of those 16 original signs, subsequent storms severely damaged eight of them. In 2013, Amtrak re-installed the eight undam-
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Educational Signs

aged, original signs on the eastern half of the Boardwalk when it completed its bridge reconstruction project.

In 2016, Kathie Cassidy, The Foundation Treasurer, ably augmented the efforts of Bob DeSanto, the President, to restore the remaining signs by successfully obtaining sponsors for each of the damaged signs.

The Foundation is deeply grateful to the businesses that contributed $800 for each sign in this project: Charter Oak Federal Credit Union-“A Glimpse of the Past”; Chelsea Groton Bank-“Hole in the Wall”; Dime Bank-“Fishes of Niantic Bay”; Dominion Energy-“Life in an Estuary”; Donna and Richard Gada and Family-“The Iron Horse”; Heritage Properties Niantic-“A Place for Play”; Lillian’s Café and Protek Auto-“McCook Point”; and Niantic Dairy Queen-“Shellfish”

The Restoration was completed by FourColor, Inc., Pannier Graphics, and Fast Signs, Inc. of Waterford.

The next time you are walking on the Boardwalk, stop to once again view and read these signs which tell us “The Stories of the Land”, “Fishes of the River and Bay”, and “The Glacial Legacy”. Both children and adults are educated by the wonderful stories told in this beloved place of Wind and Waves.

The donations to the town of these signs on the Boardwalk were: $25,000 in Grants; $10,000 in Foundation Donation; $6,400 in Business Donations; Total Donations-$41,400

The East Lyme Public Trust Foundation appreciate the comments of readers. Be sure to follow them on Facebook and go to their website for further information: publictrustfoundation.org

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Holiday Shopping

And let's not forget the doorstops! Every home was equipped with at least one!

Playing an important part in this scenario were the Larkin catalog, Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogs, all with dog-eared pages where the dream world of gift-giving reigned. Nor should we forget the Redemption Gift book for Green Stamps! How we did covet those stamps! Now that we look back, we can appreciate Mother's sacrificing some of hers to complete those needed for a special purchase we wished to make.

How willing we were to make the Post Office trip when waiting for a catalog purchase. Something really big might have required shipment by railroad to arrive at the Freight Station which stood where the Apartment Building behind the Post Office in Niantic now stands (which has since moved). If it was a really big package and involved a surprise, much ingenuity went into bargaining with a relative or neighbor with a wagon or a car in order to keep the big secret from parents.

The General Stores - early there was Partlo's in Flanders and later on York Ave. in Niantic, Hick's - Tubbs on Pennsylvania Ave. and later Wilson's - first where the Golden Needle and Happy Carrot Bookstore are (no longer) located today and Segal's where Smith Pharmacy (The Black Sheep now) stands - all offered solutions for the "store-bought" items on the Wish Lists.

In later years, the Village Store on Main Street, later located on Pennsylvania Ave., later to become Malloy's, were the answer to relaxed shopping where clothing, jewelry, toys and everyday necessities could be found.

Meanwhile after school and on weekends we all earned money going into nearby Dodge Woods, Clark's, Tubbs' and George Simon Smith's for evergreens, laurel and princess pine which would be taken to the woodshed or barn where we made wreaths, brightened with festive black alder berries for home and for sale.

As December progressed every rainy or snowy day Mothers kept youngsters busy stringing freshly popped corn and the new crop of cranberries. These we found in the bogs on Chesterfield Rd., at Smith's on Boston Post Rd. and on the west side of Fairhaven Rd. I've also been told there was once a bog where the rifle Range near the Camp was Excavated.

With the first frosts of November the family hogs were butchered, with some of the meat smoked for bacon and hams, while the choicest fresh loins were kept for Holiday eating or gifts to "city" relatives.
Holiday Shopping

Some families were fattening up the chosen Holiday goose, and our early ethnic groups were gathering their Holiday specialties.

As our Nation recovered from the Depression after World War I, youngsters had learned the value of thrift, so many of us had our own Christmas Clubs where we deposited a certain little amount each week with checks distributed to us in November. Each of us had our little "windfalls" spent at least three different ways before the final decisions were made.

The anticipation of all this activity added to the Holiday spirit and the fun of gift-giving. The pace was slower--and spread out over more months so we were not so physically or emotionally - or financially exhausted with the rituals. We had time to think-to plan-and to make our own Holiday Cards and many of our gifts. We were grateful for the one gift from parents - not the entire wish list - and strange as it may now seem - we were grateful for the one orange in the bottom of the stocking for a supply of oranges in the dead of winter was unheard of. Simplicity, humility, sincerity ruled the process of gift-giving and set the Spirit of the Season.

The preceding article was originally published in an early issue of THE POST ROAD REVIEW.

Many readers will not recognize some of the locations the author refers to in this story as so many have changed over the years since this article was written.

The author, Olive Tubbs Chendali, who passed away in 1999, was a regular contributor to our magazine in its early years and we preserve her work here as a memorial to the effort she contributed in helping to get our magazine off the ground some 25 years ago.
STARS TO STEM RECEIVES GRANT FROM CHELSEA GROTON FOUNDATION

In November, STARS to STEM, Inc. was notified that a $1,000 grant was approved for the purpose of start up from the Chelsea Groton Foundation, Incorporated. STARS to STEM, Inc. is a local non-profit corporation dedicated to renovation of the existing planetarium space at East Lyme High School to create a community and regional educational asset.

Currently the space (which has not been operational since 2013) requires a restoration and technology upgrade. Fundraising for this project is ongoing and will depend on private/corporate donations, the work of volunteers, and grant awards. No Board of Education funds or tax dollars will be used.

“STARS to STEM, Inc. is thrilled to announce this award as we continue to reach for the stars to restore the planetarium at East Lyme High School as a regional asset for all ages,” stated Diane Swan, President of STARS to STEM.

STARS to STEM is one of 136 organizations which have been supported by the Chelsea Groton Foundation that has donated nearly 1 million to date this year. In the words of Chelsea Groton Foundation President, B. Michael Rauh, Jr., these grants are provided “to enrich and support our shared communities,” which is especially in the current pandemic environment.

Donations can be made by mail to STARS to STEM, Inc., P.O. Box 616, Niantic, CT 06357. Interested parties with questions can email Diane Swan at starstostem@gmail.com. For more information visit online at www.starstostem.org.

Free Virtual Cooking Demonstration

The Estuary Council of Seniors is hosting a free virtual cooking demonstration on Dec. 4th at 6:30 pm. Food Service Manager, Aaron Pratt, will walk participants through how to make a simple steak pho soup, a delicious Vietnamese dish to warm everyone up this winter!

This is the first in what the Estuary Council hopes will be an ongoing program. This event will be interactive so participants will have the opportunity to cook along and ask questions throughout the demonstration if they wish.

This event is free and open to the public but registration is required. To register, please email events@ccsenior.org with PHO in the subject to sign up and receive the link to the demonstration as well as the recipe.

Merry Christmas
Niantic Light Parade in the Park
Saturday, December 12, 5pm - 8pm at McCook Point Park

This year marks the 32nd year of the Niantic Light Parade and some major changes are in store due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time in its history, the parade will not take place on Main Street, but instead will be held within the confines of McCook Point Park.

Participant floats will be on display in the upper part of McCook Point Park while viewers will drive through the park to view the stationary floats.

Patrons coming to view the floats will be allowed into the park via the main entrance beginning at 5 PM on December 12th. Patrons must be in a vehicle, no pedestrians will be allowed for this event. There is no entry fee, but collections for Care and Share will be accepted and are encouraged.

It is the hope of the event’s organizers that the drive-through format for this year will allow families to safely enjoy this fun holiday tradition from their car with floats, music and lights galore to kick-off the holiday season in brilliant style.

If you have any questions, or if you would like to create a float and participate in this amazing community event, please call East Lyme Parks and Recreation at 860-739-5828.

TED Talks Online:
“All About Vaccines”

Vaccines have always been important, but now this field of research is making headlines as scientists race to put the brakes on the COVID-19 pandemic. People all over the world are asking “How quickly can a vaccine be made?” “What challenges and concerns are we faced with?” and “How can we tell vaccine facts from fiction?”

Learn the answers to these questions and more with Henry Carter Hull Library’s selection of informative TED Talks curated by Lynn Hidek.

Register now for this free virtual program for adults on Tuesday, 12/15 at 9:30 AM. To sign up, email sarah@hchlibrary.org. To view the talks in advance, visit: hchlibrary.org/event/ed

Free SCORE Webinar:
Marketing Fundamentals

Wednesday, December 9, 2020 | 5:00 - 6:30 PM

This interactive session with Business Executive and SCORE Mentor Margo Weitekamp provides marketing fundamentals for individuals with no formal training who want to grow their businesses.

Participants will learn to create customer engagement, define key elements of their marketing strategy, and discuss digital ‘must-haves’ for their on-line presence. There will be time for questions and feedback. Pre-registration is required. After registering, participants will receive an email containing information about joining the meeting. For further information, and for registration details, contact SCORE Southeastern CT at (860) 388-9508, or by email to scorechapter@gmail.com.
HISTORY’S SANTA
by Jim Littlefield

Donder and Blitzen (German for “thunder” and “lightning”) first made their appearance in 1823, springing from the pen of Clement Clarke Moore in the classic poem “A Visit from St. Nicholas” more commonly known now as “The Night before Christmas”. Up until that time Americans were pretty hazy regarding Santa Claus, the patron saint of Christmas. Moore would help define him as a sack-bearing, chimney-climbing gift-giver… a reindeer-powered sleigh operator; an overweight and jolly sojourner from the northlands and, despite Moore’s personal distaste for tobacco, a pipe smoking, wreath-encircled bearer of good will. It would take a later contribution during the trying time of America’s Civil War to put the finishing touches on that image.

Thomas Nast was born in 1840 in Germany, but moved to New York with his family in 1846. Unable to speak English early on and never learning to read or write well despite some early schooling, his prospects for gainful employment in his adopted land appeared quite remote. Physically he was described as short and fat, but despite those many shortcomings, Thomas had shown an early talent for drawing. At age 15, he somehow mustered enough courage to walk by the receptionist’s desk into the office of the famous Frank Leslie, requesting a job as an illustrator. Originally laughed at, he was given the seemingly impossible task of going down to the Manhattan wharf and drawing all the people there at rush hour. The young boy eagerly embraced the assignment and completed the picture by the next day. Young Thomas Nast was hired as an illustrator by Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper for four dollars a week, beginning a successful career that would span many decades.

It was during America’s Civil War that Thomas Nast came into prominence as America’s foremost cartoonist and illustrator. Unfit for military service, he became a war correspondent for Harper’s Weekly and his drawings of battles and conditions at the front soon began to reach into many America’s homes. In appreciation of his war effort, President Abraham Lincoln once proclaimed the young Nast to be “our best recruiting sergeant.”

It was in a picture entitled “Santa Claus Comes in Camp,” where Nast first prominently used the image of Santa Claus. For inspiration he had his wife Sarah read him the Clement Clarke Moore’s poem before starting the work. Nast would go on to create some seventy-six Christmas drawings over his lifetime and in the process, help define Santa Claus as we know him today. From Nast’s work came the concept of Santa being from the North Pole (thus being a citizen of the world, not from a specific country), the idea of a workshop staffed by elves, letters to be sent to Santa making requests and gifts being given exclusively to those children who had been good the previous year. Santa’s outfit was defined as red and white striped trousers, along with a blue coat splashed with white stars. A smallish funnel-shaped fur cap would don his patriotic head. It was this particular image created by Thomas Nast for the Christmas of 1862 that would capture the heart of well-known Civil War re-enactor Wilber D. (Willi) Runk.

Willi Runk was a born teacher and taught not only for a living, but also as a personal passion in his spare time. Until his recent retirement he taught history at the Talcott Mountain Academy in Avon, but also spent much of his spare time in “the hobby” (as it is called) of historic re-enacting. Willi started out doing Revolution-
ary War portrayals in the early 1990’s as a Hessian officer but after a while he and his wife Becky began Civil War era re-enacting, playing the part of a surgeon and later a union captain. Each part was carefully scripted with typical Willi Runk attention to historical detail…the clothing, the voice, the overall demeanor of the one being portrayed. He might be found at Gettysburg, mounted on a horse and giving orders to his troops or at another Civil War reenacting site perhaps commanding the cannons to fire…all high drama for those interested and willing to learn more about history.

Willi later joined “The Society of Europe,” an umbrella organization for all portrayals, and began to do more civilian impressions of the time. He portrayed a Prussian ambassador to the U.S. by the name of Baron von Gerolt for many years, but then he stumbled on, of all people, Santa Claus.

For those who are familiar with the Smith-Harris House, East Lyme’s mid-19th century museum, it definitely has a certain magic about it, especially during the holiday season. Willi Runk sensed that right away. Many times during the year while doing impressions on the grounds for Heritage Weekend or other events, he would comment on the feel of the place and would often say that of all the many historic places where he had visited or performed, this was his favorite.

“I remember many conversations Willi and I have had over the years,” said Georgia Lee Littlefield, architect of many of the Smith-Harris House historical programs. “Willi would often comment on the attention to detail we gave the place and that was high praise coming from someone of his historic stature. One day we were
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Virtual Events for Adults from the Waterford Public Library

Guest author Jeff Benedict: Wednesday, December 2, 7:00 pm -
Author Jeff Benedict will talk about his newest title - The Dynasty. How was the Patriots dynasty built? And how did it last for two decades? In The Dynasty, acclaimed journalist Jeff Benedict provides richly reported answers in a sweeping account based on exclusive interviews with more than two hundred insiders.

Guest author Marian Lindberg: Monday, December 7, 6:30 pm -
Waterford library will welcome Marian Lindberg, author of Scandal on Plum Island: a commander becomes the accused (2020). Deeply researched, involving historical figures as contrasting as Theodore Roosevelt and Susan B. Anthony, Scandal on Plum Island traces Major Benjamin Koehler’s career from respected officer to vilified outcast and turns up provocative information about his defense. Author Marian Lindberg is a lawyer and award-winning journalist.

Speculative Fiction Book Discussion Series: The Time Machine by H. G. Wells (1895) Monday, December 14, 7:00 pm - A gentleman inventor living in England, traverses first thousands of years and then millions into the future, before bringing back the knowledge of the grave degeneration of the human race and the planet. Pam Bedore facilitates this discussion series. Pam is a professor of English at UConn, Avery Point.

The Bobcat – Connecticut’s Secretive Wild Cat: Wednesday, December 16, 7:00 pm - Paul Colburn, a certified Master Wildlife Conservationist (MWC) will give this presentation which focuses on the natural history of bobcats in Connecticut. An overview of bobcat habitat, diet, behavior, reproduction, and current research efforts and Mountain lions will also be discussed.

Advance registration is required for the above events. Participants can register online in advance with the Zoom Links available on the library’s Calendar of Events at www.waterfordpubliclibrary.org.

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talking about our Christmas program and I remember saying it was too bad we did not have an accurate period-correct Santa to offer the public. Willi said he would give that some thought (and research) and get back to me. It might be a way, he said in parting, for him to bring history to the ‘little ones’.

And it was a short time indeed before Thomas Nast’s 1862 Santa was reborn, complete with patriotic clothing and demeanor. “Happy Christmas!” Willi Runk would announce as visitors entered the house. Children would crowd in around him, some sitting on the floor while others vied for a place on his lap. His cookies and tea would be on the table beside him. The story of the historic Santa Claus would then begin to unfold before them, with both young and old people in attendance captivated by the man’s knowledge and warm delivery. “Mall Santas can be frightening to some children,” Mrs. Littlefield related, “but I never once saw any child do anything but gravitate to our Santa. It was a tribute to Willi Runk’s skill and who he was as a person.” Wilber D. “Willi” Runk died of a heart attack August 30, 2012.

A poem entitled “Oh, Santa Please” was composed by a grateful Smith–Harris House several months earlier to celebrate Willi’s retirement from teaching. Looking back, it now appears quite prophetic.

“Oh, Santa Please”
Oh, Santa please…say it ain’t so,
That our Willi Runk would now want to go.
What will he do when he leaves us here?
Maybe board a sleigh with eight tiny reindeer?
With memories of us all sifted and sorted,
He’ll take to the skies, no mission aborted.
With many talents and his Becky beside him,
That sleigh will land safely with her there to guide him.
So let us proclaim as he drives from our sight,
Our good wishes go with you and to you a good flight!

Postscript - Willi always had his pipe with him whenever he played Thomas Nast’s Santa at the Museum, but he would never light it when the “little ones” were around. Afterwards, however, still in character, he could often be spotted contently smoking that pipe as he sat back in a rocking chair out on the front porch. There are any number of folks who claim to have witnessed this and cannot be dissuaded from their belief that the smoke from the pipe curled in an odd sort of way over his bespectacled head… “Almost like a wreath,” one of them said.

The preceding article originally appeared in the December 2012 issue of THE POST ROAD REVIEW.
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Niantic Jingle Bell 5K

So many things have changed in 2020 but some things remain the same. Help to keep the tradition of one of the best road races in Connecticut alive. Your participation in this year's event will allow the mission of the Brian Dagle Foundation, which is to provide grief support groups and programs for anyone who has lost a special someone in their life as well as to educate schools, businesses and our community on mental health and suicide prevention to continue. Now more than ever there is need for the healing, hope, and support they provide.

You can help by participating in the NJ5K Virtual Run/Walk. The Virtual Run/Walk means you pick the time, route, and distance you want to run/walk. The cool thing about the virtual event is you can complete it anytime between Thanksgiving and Christmas. After you have completed your race/walk, post on social media using #njb5k and you’ll be recognized as a NJB5K competitor! There is even an app for that! Download the ITS YOUR RACE app.

You can also participate in the live event. To help maintain a safe race environment the Niantic Jingle Bell 5K will utilize a rolling start from 8:30am to 9:30am on December 12th. This means you can start from the start line anytime between 8:30am and 9:30am (the finishing line closed at 10:30am). Please consider your start time so you complete the course by 10:30 if you want to receive an official time and receive your NJB5K finisher medal. There is no MASS start as has been done in the past. You will cross a timing mat at the start and end of the race. Your race time and results will be posted on line at itsyourrace.com.

There is NO race day registration per state COVID regulations. Registration must be done on line before the race. There will be bib pick up available at McCook Park the day of the race or in days preceding the race (more details on that as the time gets closer).

State COVID regulations mandate that there be no awards ceremony. Awards will be announced and winners will be notified. The awards can be picked up at Brian’s Healing Hearts or mailed to the winners. Awards given for top 3 males/females overall and top male/female in the following age groups; 10 and under, 11-14, 15-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70+. Awards and finisher medals will be given to participants in the live race only.

There will be bottled water available at the start/finish line area but there will be NO water on the course. You are responsible for any hydration that you need during the race/walk.

This year event organizers have also added a family friendly scavenger hunt. This is free, but a donation is suggested. When you sign up, you will receive a scavenger hunt card with clues leading you to Elves throughout Main Street and town. Finish the whole hunt and be entered to win some raffle prizes. This scavenger hunt can be completed from Thanksgiving through Christmas.

For further information and registration details, please visit discovereastlyme.com
Library Selected as a Stop & Shop Beneficiary

Mystic & Noank Library has been selected as a beneficiary of the Stop & Shop Community Bag Program for the month of December. The program, which launched in May 2019, is a reusable bag program that facilitates community support with the goal to make a difference in the communities where shoppers live and work.

The Mystic & Noank Library was selected as the December beneficiary of the program by store leadership at the Stop & Shop located at 91 Voluntown Road, in Pawcatuck. As a beneficiary, the library will receive a $1 donation every time a $2.50 reusable Community Bag is purchased at this location during the month of December, unless otherwise directed by the customer through the Giving Tag attached to the bag.

“We are so grateful to be chosen as a recipient of this program” states Karen Wall, Executive Director of Mystic & Noank Library. “Initiatives like these enable us to continue providing quality programs and services to our community free of charge, and in these times of uncertainty this is more important than ever.”

Mystic & Noank Library is a non-profit based in Mystic, CT. Founded in 1893, Mystic & Noank Library aspires to support each individual’s cultural and creative interest to enable our community to better understand the past, succeed in the present and prepare for the future. Learn more about Mystic & Noank Library by visiting mysticnoanklibrary.org. For more information on the Stop & Shop Community Bag Program, visit stopandshop.bags4mycause.com.
Events Listings for Teens and Tweens from the Waterford Public Library

Teen Harry Potter Mandrake Craft: Tuesday, December 8, 4:45-5:45 pm - Join up for a Harry Potter themed virtual craft night where participants will create their own Mandrake plants out of clay. Although the cries of the magical Mandrake plant can be extremely dangerous, this activity will be perfectly safe (no earmuffs required). Bring along your knowledge of Harry Potter because you'll have the chance to answer some trivia questions too! Register for the zoom meeting through the library's online calendar of events and then stop in the children's room to pick up your kit filled with everything you need to join our virtual craft night. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. Recommended for ages 10 and up.

Grab & Go Tween Craft Kit: Monday, December 28, 11-8:00 pm - During vacation week, stop into the Waterford Public Library while supplies last for a grab and go Tween Craft Kit including instructions and materials on how to create a paracord bracelet and a ninja on a skateboard. Recommended for ages 10 and up.

Non-Profits: HELP US HELP YOU
For more information, please call (860) 537-1260 or E-mail: sales@postroadreview.com
Lyme Land Trust Launches Video of Virtual Plant Walk

Take a remote “walk” to learn about plants in a Lyme Preserve. The Lyme Land Trust is excited to launch their first full-length educational video: An Exploration of Forest Plants on the Ravine Trail with Mike Zarfos, naturalist.

Rather than cancel the guided walk which was scheduled for May 30, 2020, they asked Mike to lead a remote walk so that the Lyme Land Trust video production team could record it and provide this virtual tour.

Viewers can enjoy the video in the comfort of their homes and then apply the information on their walks in local preserves.

In the video, which is about a half-hour long, Mike explains how to identify several prominent species of plants and shares interesting facts about their human uses and natural ecology. Michael Zarfos is a Naturalist and PhD Candidate in Conservation Biology at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

Visit the Lyme Land Trust website to view the video: https://www.lymelandtrust.org/educational-videos/

The Lyme Land Trust has been working hard to bring to the public videos of their preserves. Check out their other virtual explorations: Preserve Highlights, which are short videos (less than 2 minutes) of walks and other experiences in Lyme preserves; and Trail Cam Videos.

Virtual Pet Show

The Groton Public Library invites participants of all ages to share their pets on Zoom. The Virtual Pet Show, on Tuesday, December 29, at 3 p.m. will be led by Officer Heather of the Town of Groton Police Department and her K9 companion, Chase.

All pets are welcome: cats, dogs, rabbits, fish, reptiles, insects—whatever! Participants are asked to have their cameras enabled during the group meeting and to be prepared to answer a few questions such as their first names, what kind of pet (species and breed, if known); pet’s name and age, what they most love about their pet, and if the pet knows any tricks or has any special talents that can be demonstrated. Adults may assist younger attendees.

Please register in advance for the Virtual Pet Show at grotonpl.org. Zoom information will be emailed to registered attendees prior to the meeting.
Letters to the Community

Helping Pets

LJ Shoreline Realty held its first annual Pet Food Drive on Saturday, November 21, 2020. We want to thank everyone who came out and donated. It was a huge success! Community and fun while helping pets! What could be better?

Our signature LJ Shoreline Realty pickup truck was parked at Gumdrops & Lollipops on Main Street, Niantic and the donations started pouring in! Our truck was so full we had to make a second run for delivering the donations!

The Connecticut Humane Society’s Pet Food Pantry Program provides pet food and supplies to pet owners in need. Being part of a caring community is important to the LJ Shoreline Realty team. We want to be sure families in need can still care for their furry loved ones. With so many families in financial difficulty, pantries are struggling to keep up.

Our Pet Food Drive donations were delivered to the CHS in Waterford. What was so wonderful was the tremendous generosity of our community! There are so many good and caring people who want to help families in need. We don’t want people to have to choose between giving gifts for their kids or feeding their pets! LJ Shoreline Realty would like to wish you all a very Happy Holiday Season!
- Sandy Gignac, Realtor, LJ Shoreline Realty

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East Lyme: Thursdays 12/3 · 7:15 pm; Sundays 12/6 · 2:10 pm
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Technology Programs

Book-a-Tech - Wednesdays, December 2, 9, 16 & 30, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. - Having trouble setting up an email account, downloading ebooks, or using your smartphone or tablet? Book a virtual appointment with GPL’s technology librarian and receive one-on-one help with all of your technology-related questions. Email Emily Sheehan at esheehan@groton-ct.gov to set up an appointment.

Grow with Google: Power Your Job Search with Google Tools - On Demand Webinar - In this webinar, discover new job opportunities using Google Search and organize your job search experience using G Suite tools. You will also learn strategies to improve your resume, tips to help you communicate effectively online, virtual interview best practices, and the latest resources from Google and other partners to help support job seekers. Registration is free and required. Visit https://tinyurl.com/yyb99k4c to access the webinar.

Cutting the Cord - Wednesday, December 9, at 3 p.m. - In this virtual class, discover the ins and outs of movie and TV streaming services. Learn what equipment you need to get started, what services are available, and if cutting the cord is the right move for you. Please register for all virtual programs at grotonpl.org. Zoom information will be emailed to registered attendees prior to the meeting.

Internet Safety - Wednesday, December 16, at 3 p.m. - In this virtual class, participants will learn the importance of staying safe in a digital world. Discover how to create great passwords, avoid email scams, and check out your digital footprint. Please register for all virtual programs at grotonpl.org. Zoom information will be emailed to registered attendees prior to the meeting.

The Groton Public Library is located at 52 Newtown Road, Groton. For more information about library programs or services, please call (860) 441-6750 or visit grotonpl.org. All programs hosted by the Groton Public Library are inclusive and open to people of all ability levels. Please contact the Library for information about available accommodations.
Groton Public Library Presents: DISNEY TRIVIA

Thursday, December 3, at 6:30 p.m.

Grab your family, put your thinking caps on, and get ready to enjoy a night to test your knowledge of all things Disney.

Laugh and sing along as you explore the whole “Wonderful World,” from movies to theme parks and so much more. This program is for dreamers of all ages, so grab your mouse ears and get ready for a good time!

Please register for this virtual program through the Groton Public Library’s online calendar at grotonpl.org. Zoom meeting information will be emailed to Groton Public Library newsletter subscribers, registered attendees, and by request.

For more information about library programs or services, please call (860) 441-6750 or visit grotonpl.org. Note that programming may be affected or cancelled due to COVID-19.
Ed Bird used to say that ghosts are most active when something or someone comes along to disrupt their normal routine. I guess if anyone would know about such things, it would be Ed, after all, he is the head of the “Regional Investigators of the Paranormal” or R.I.P. as they like to call themselves. We have summoned Ed on rare occasions when a history mystery just ran out of logical explanations.

Two such instances come to mind. One was when students on an archaeological dig of ours near the east end of Roxbury Road reported uneasy feelings when standing on the banks of a brook where four-year-old Johnny Chapman had drowned during the early evening hours of January 8, 1880.

The other had to do with a strange noise that had been heard at the Smith-Harris House. Those who reported it said it sounded like a woman’s scream. Ed would have a great deal to add to one of those cases but could provide little information about the other. (Both stories were detailed in an earlier book on East Lyme history, History Matters: Tales of New England That Still Echo Today.)

Cemeteries are normally quiet places where the dead rest and the living sometimes come to offer their respects. East Lyme has 19 such places but really only two major ones that are currently in use. (Union Cemetery in Niantic and the East Lyme Cemetery in Flanders…) but a few of the others do take just cremains.) The Old Stone Church Burial Ground is the oldest (c.1719) and I arrived there recently with tools in hand, knowing in advance that I would be making more noise than the average visitor.

The Old Stone Church Burial Ground committee had asked me to do some repairs/additions to a wrought iron gate at this Riverview Road/Society Road graveyard. Some wavy balusters (called “pickets” if one was dealing with wood) had gone missing over the years, along with a latch and a holdfast or “stay,” a metal rod that drops from gate to ground holding one of the two existing gates in place. As I began the job, I had the feeling I might be providing entertainment or at least some interest for the cemetery’s 750 permanent residents.

I know that Olive Chendali, our illustrious former town historian, looked on. (She and her husband, Reno, are buried quite close to the front gate.) But unlike many others, this woman remains very much among the living with her posthumous articles featured monthly on the front page of the Post Road Review magazine. As an ex-schoolteacher who always insisted things be done properly, I knew she would definitely be on board with any needed repairs, that is, if they were done in the correct manner! I knew I wanted no red marks on my paper.

I took some measurements and sketched out a diagram of what was needed. I was being pretty quiet at the time but perhaps maybe not so quiet as to escape the watchful eye of another cemetery resident, Mr. James Huntley. Captain Huntley, after all, was a trained Revolutionary War soldier who fought at the famed Battle of Bunker Hill and also participated in various campaigns in northern New York in 1775 and 1776. Having eagerly gone off to answer the “Lexington Alarm” in Massachusetts as part of the 3rd Connecticut Regiment under Lt. Col. Experience Storrs, Captain Huntley would definitely know an intruder when he set his eyes on one.

But I put aside any dis-ease when I considered what else I knew of the man. For one thing, he had been very considerate of future generations by autographing his personal powder horn and detailing the places on that same horn where he and his regiment had once fought. (I had the privilege of holding that powder horn in my hands.) I also learned when researching him that he was not a young man when called to the service of his country. I vividly remember examining a yellowed letter sent his way by a commanding officer in 1776. James Huntley had resigned from active service citing “the fatigue of campaigning” brought on by his advancing age. This resignation had been regretfully acknowledged in this note by his superior.

Not wanting to remain idle, James Huntley would finish out the war serving on local supply committees, making sure soldiers in the field got what they needed to continue the fight against the British. No, here was a man, I felt, who might understand me, an old schoolteacher who was still looking to do something meaningful in retirement. Now reasonably assured that the Captain would not object to my presence, I headed back home to the workshop to see what I had on hand for needed supplies.

I had material for the three missing balusters and just the right diameter rod to make the holdfast. Searching for the best metal to make the latch would take a little more effort. Also, the design would take more thought and require a little more resourcefulness. Cemetery resident and “the Mistress of Resourcefulness” (my words), Mercy Sands Raymond, came to mind.

Mercy is also buried here despite the fact that she lived most of her life out on Block Island. (Late in life and after her husband died,
History Matters  

she came to live locally with her daughter and died while doing so.) While on Block Island, Mrs. Raymond once faced a daunting and potentially life-threatening challenge few women would welcome. Imagine if you were left in a lonely coastal home with six children, ages two though fifteen while your husband was away tending his business affairs in New London. Imagine for a minute that a threatening presence would happen by and knock at your door and the man standing there would be none other than notorious pirate captain, William Kidd! 

There is little doubt that this scenario actually did play out. Only the details are still debated by historians. What is important here in the story is how this woman would react. Would she panic? Would she throw herself at his mercy? (No pun intended.) Not a chance. The lady of the house reportedly responded so calmly and so resourcefully that after only a short stay, ol’ “Buccaneer Bill” would leave without harming her or her young family. He would even leave a substantial monetary gift for her hospitality which she would later invest in Montville real estate. (Full stories of both Mercy Raymond and James Huntley can be found in Fireside Memories: Tales of East Lyme’s Past.)

Now early photographs of the gate provided by current town historian, Liz Kuchta, gave evidence of some of the now missing pieces but no clues for the latch were forthcoming. I considered a possible crossbar sliding latch. That just might be the very thing that would bridge the eleven-inch gap between the two gates, securing them together. Of course, I would have to fashion a backplate, weld some loops or cleats on to that and then forge a crossbar that would move along through those loops, reaching out to engage the other gate. A “keep” would be fashioned there that would receive the incoming crossbar. It, too, would require a small backplate with a single welded metal loop. Sounded like a reasonable plan to me. But as they say… “Ah, but for the best laid schemes of mice and men.”

I sure could have used some positive residential support when I returned with latch in hand to the Old Stone Burial Ground and immediately ran into trouble. I had temporarily clamped it to the existing gate only to find the gate stanchion I needed to affix it to was bent considerably. That was a dealbreaker as there was no way to keep things level with the new latch and no way to straighten out the gate without great effort made to remove and take it back to the shop. (Talk about “preexisting conditions!”) I could not believe I had not noticed this before and certainly should have known better.

continued page 23
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Closures of Lyme Preserves for Deer Firearm Hunting Season

Firearm hunting season for deer began on November 18, 2020 in several Lyme preserves owned by the Town of Lyme or the Lyme Land Conservation Trust.

The following preserves will be closed Nov. 18 through Dec. 22, Monday through Friday, to all users except deer firearm hunters: Beebe Preserve, Chestnut Hill Preserve, Eno Preserve, Jewett Preserve, Johnston Preserve, Mount Archer Woods, Pickwick’s Preserve (private property with an easement for the trail); Plimpton Preserve, Slawson Preserve.

Please note that no hunting is allowed on Saturdays or Sundays in these preserves.

Permits for hunting on these preserves are granted by the Town of Lyme Open Space Coordinator each year to a limited number of licensed hunters. The hunting program for this year is fully subscribed. (For more information on hunting programs and seasons, go to https://www.lymelandtrust.org/hunting-program/)

The Post Road Review
offers to non-profit organizations the publication of news, event listings and press releases free of charge on a space-available basis. To submit an event listing or press release, email editor@postroadreview.com
Back to the drawing board to look for another solution. This time I resolved to pay closer attention to detail.

Now there was one man in this cemetery whose attention to detail was legendary. Vine Utley was our local doctor for almost thirty years during the early 1800’s. He and his family lived up on the Flanders Four Corners where Walgreens Pharmacy is currently located. Talk about paying close attention… why this guy kept meticulous records of everything, including a diary of all of his patients…their illnesses, treatment, etc. (So much for HIPAA privacy laws.) Anything of importance he had written down. Dr. Utley’s records proved invaluable to us when we were trying to solve the case of the desperate, delusional, and disease-ridden blacksmith, Calvin Spencer. Later, Dr. Utley would again come to our rescue with his meticulous observations of local weather and crop failures when we were investigating the famed year of 1816, sometimes referred to as “the year without a summer.”

Yes, he was quite a person and well respected about town. But he did make mistakes. This “vampire doctor” as he was sometimes called, came by that nickname due to his frequent use of bloodletting, a now discredited medical procedure. When Dr. Utley’s was locally touting his innovative smallpox inoculation, he tried to convince residents of its effectiveness by publicly performing the procedure on his pregnant wife, Rebecca. For that, Dr. Utley was arrested and put on trial. (He was eventually absolved of any wrongdoing.) One time, Dr. Utley became involved in local politics, only to soon be slapped with a lawsuit by a political opponent. Lesson learned. He would stick to practicing medicine after that.

My lesson learned…I came up with an alternate plan for the latch. A drop latch, this time….one that would be less affected by the bent stanchion.

Welding day, October 31, 2020. Arrangements were made by Liz Kuchta and Rod McCauley to have professional welder, Rod Tulba, drop by to lend his expertise to the job. Mr. Tulba has been in the welding business for over thirty years and had the necessary portable welder/generator to finish the project. With Ellen Ashburn (who heads up the cemetery committee) and a few others looking on, all was quickly and efficiently welded into place.

Driving home I had the feeling that all had nicely fallen into place. Those who make this graveyard their home would certainly be happy, I thought to myself. I knew I would be returning before too long, not to work, but to visit. After all, my mother is among their number. (It should be noted that this burial ground is managed by the Niantic Community Church and does still accept cremains.) I was happy that Mom had found so many interesting friends on her journey through the cosmos. I always leave a little pebble on her grave marker whenever I visit. I’m told that is an old Jewish custom. The Hebrew word for “pebble” is also a word meaning “bond.” By placing a pebble on a gravestone, it bonds the deceased with the visitor, or so it has been said.

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"Fireside Memories: Tales of East Lyme’s Past." contains the last five years of "History Matters" articles from the Post Road Review (60 total) and can be purchased from Amazon or bought locally at Book Barn, Bayberries, Olde Red Salt Box or Barbers Plus One.

The book can also be purchased from the author. (jnlittlefield@gmail.com)
Event Listings for Children from the Waterford Public Library

Preschool Scavenger Hunt: Beginning Monday, December 7 for the whole month. Good luck finding items around your house to match the questions! Recommended for ages 3 and up during the entire month of December 2020. To access the online Preschool Scavenger Hunt, go to the Calendar of Events at waterfordpubliclibrary.org.

Grab & Go Craft: Saturday, December 12, 10-5:00 pm - Drop in anytime during the next two weeks to pick up supplies to make an ABC soup craft at home. Check the library’s Facebook page for a step-by-step video tutorial on how to make your craft.

Tellabration Storytelling: Saturday, December 12, 10:30 – 11:30 am - Join up for a virtual Tellabration, for families with Teresa Whitaker and Frank Schwartz! Teresa and Frank awaken imaginations with story and music. They infuse world folk tales, myths and original stories with rhythm, movement, creative dramatics and song. Using voices, guitar, harp, banjo and percussion they invite audience participation and inspire a love for these timeless stories. Please register in advance at waterfordpubliclibrary.org for this Zoom meeting.

Bookmarkers Book Club: Wednesday, December 16, 4:15-5:15 pm - for those 9 to 12 years old. Multiple copies of Dealing with Dragons by Patricia Wrede will be available at the circulation desk. Register in advance at waterfordpubliclibrary.org for this Zoom meeting.

Page Turners Book Club: Thursday, December 17, 4:15-5:15 pm - for those 6 to 9 years old. Multiple copies of Juana and Lucas by Juana Medina will be available at the circulation desk. Register in advance at waterfordpubliclibrary.org for this Zoom meeting.

Grab & Go New Year’s Party Kit: Wednesday, December 30, 10-5:00 pm - Stop by the library to pick up a grab and go New Year’s Party Kit complete with a craft and supplies to ring in the new year! Recommended for ages 3 and up.

Hibernate, Migrate or Play in the Snow! Wednesday, December 30, 3-3:45 pm - Learn about local wildlife species and their methods for making it through a cold New England winter. Meet a migratory bird, reptiles, and amphibians that hibernate! This is an online zoom family program for kids of all ages presented by the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center.

Grab & Go New Year’s Party Kit: Thursday, December 31, 10-5:00 pm - Stop by the library to pick up a grab and go New Year’s Party Kit complete with a craft and supplies to ring in the new year! Recommended for ages 3 and up.
TOURING SMITHSONIAN EXHIBIT AT LYMAN ALLYN ART MUSEUM

Things Come Apart, a traveling exhibition circulated by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), features the works of creative photographer and tinkerer Todd McLellan, who explores the evolution of the smartphone and dozens of other everyday technologies. The traveling exhibition opened at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum on Saturday, Nov. 14, and will remain on view through Feb. 7, 2021 before continuing its 12-city national tour.

“This exhibit reveals to us the inner workings of our favorite things,” said Sam Quigley, Director of the Lyman Allyn. If you’ve ever asked what makes a clock tick, this exhibit will be a revelation! In addition, McLellan’s images are a must-see for photography fans.”

Through more than 40 captivating photographs, videos and objects encased in acrylic, Things Come Apart displays the complex parts of products across multiple industries. McLellan spent countless hours disassembling objects of all sizes and functions—from a watch to a laptop to a Walkman and even an upright piano—into hundreds or even thousands of pieces with painstaking precision. With each object fully stripped to its basic parts, he methodically worked backwards, laying out each item in reverse order from the protective case to the smallest circuits until the true scope of each design was captured. The resulting images, grouped alongside other items built for similar purposes, provide a visual history lesson of mechanical innovation and highlight the contrast between old-world craftsmanship and sleek modern engineering.

“We don’t always think about the tools we use, but working on this project has given me a greater respect for engineering of newer technology,” said McLellan, who also disassembled bicycles, compasses and power drills, among other things. “It’s remarkable how much modern design packs into so little.”

The museum is located at 625 Williams Street, New London, and is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, Sundays 1:00 - 5:00 pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. For more information call 860.443.2545, ext. 2129 or visit on Facebook or the web at: www.lymanallyn.org.
AT THE MOVIES

Rebecca

In 1938, enigmatic and reclusive British writer Daphne du Maurier published her gothic novel Rebecca. It was an instant hit, and has been continuously in print ever since; four thousand copies are still sold every day.

The novel has also been the inspiration for music and art, spawned several television mini-series, a successful stage play, and two cinematic adaptations. The first, directed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1940, is considered a masterpiece of the psychological thriller genre. The second, directed by Ben Wheatley in 2020, will not be.

Du Maurier’s story of love, loss, and memory is rock solid, creepy, scary, and resonant. It wrestles with some big themes; social class distinctions, mental illness, identity among them. It’s an engaging plotline with fully-fleshed characters that we come to care about, even if we do not like them.

The English mansion featured in the novel, known as “Manderley”, is full of locked doors, dim hallways, narrow staircases and secrets; it’s the perfect setting for a story designed to knock an audience off balance. And the novel’s plot is as twisty as the cliffside roads of Monaco, where the story begins.

English nobleman Maxim de Winter (Armie Hammer) is a very wealthy, 40-something widower who spends most of his time at his family estate. While on holiday in Monte Carlo, he meets a very young lady’s companion (Lily James). After a whirlwind romance on the Riviera, the two marry and head to Manderley to enjoy their happily ever after. But the new Mrs. de Winter finds that Mrs. Rebecca de Winter still occupies the mansion even after her tragic death.

Sinister housekeeper Mrs. Danvers (Kristin Scott Thomas) keeps the keys to the house and the house’s secrets as well, while the new Mrs. de Winter tries to leave her working-class roots behind and learn how to live in the rarified air of the British Aristocracy.

Rebecca is Downton Abbey crossed with The House on Haunted Hill. Or at least it should be. But director Ben Wheatley misses so many opportunities to give weight to his film that it finally seems to float away, rather than end.

Let’s start with what Wheatley gets right. Rebecca’s opening scenes in Monte Carlo are breathtakingly beautiful. Hammer and James are beautiful as well. Hammer is the picture of casual, aristocratic elegance; James is charming and sweet and exuberant. The chemistry between them is remarkable.

The character of Mrs. Danvers has become iconic, and Scott Thomas’ portrayal is appropriately dark and coolly menacing.

The dialog is also very good; writers Jane Goldman, Anna Waterhouse, and Joe Shrapnel mastered the tricky task of using dialog to enhance physical onscreen action, rather than describe it.

The story itself, of course, is strong. Du Maurier’s source novel closes any plot holes in advance. The wheels of the storyline are greased with Maxim’s considerable wealth, the immense size of Manderley and its environs, the rigid constrains of an aristocratic lifestyle and the new Mrs. de Winter’s sweet, naive charm.

The art direction and production design of Rebecca is exceptional. Manderley looks the way we expect an old-money mansion should, packed with paintings, gilt and objets d’art. Everything that doesn’t move is monogrammed. Meals are formal, as are the uniforms of the large below-stairs staff. Manderley is a quiet repository of the family de Winter’s past.

The costumes are worthy of the golden age of Hollywood. Maxim spends his summer holiday dressed in bespoke crumpled linen, while the new Mrs. de Winter spends their courtship stretching her very limited wardrobe. Apparently, the de Winters spent their honey-moon shopping; suddenly we see traveling clothes, tennis clothes, masquerade costumes, riding clothes, wandering-over-the-moors clothes, and dozens of matching berets.

Rebecca is a visual treat, richly colored and filled with luxe furnishings and fabrics. It’s puzzling and surprising, then, that a few of the props seem to be right out of a high-school drama club production—weightless and sloppy. They break the illusion that Wheatley is trying so hard to build.

As pretty as Rebecca is, it also rankles in several other ways. First off, it’s slow. Really slow. This is no cinematic roller coaster ride; the plodding pace keeps tension from building, and there’s an
oddly flat feel to a few sequences that would be exciting if only they’d been handled just a bit differently. Rebecca feels twice as long as it is, peppered with meaningless scenes of people walking down hallways and staring out of windows.

Many of the minor characters are caricatures. For instance, the Cornish townsfolk who depend on Manderley for their survival are almost comically unattractive, swathed in thick tweeds, and painted with a broad “poor townsfolk from the country” brush. Surely the village has one handsome resident who has access to a bar of soap.

Director Wheatley misses some prime opportunities to tighten up the tension and build suspense. In some instances, it seems as if he knows what his own directorial shortcomings are and he borrows cinematic devices liberally from other films. There are scenes that you will swear you’ve seen before. Trust your instincts; you have. I can’t list them here without spoiling the film but they’re there and they’re noticeable.

If you love a thriller, a twisting plot, an adrenaline rush, a complex mystery, set in exotic locations, see Rebecca. Just make sure you see Hitchcock’s outstanding 1940 original, available on Amazon, and not this remake. On the other hand - if you’re a fan of costume drama, solid acting, the coast of Cornwall and Kristin Scott Thomas, catch this remade Rebecca on Netflix.

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Dining with the Dudleys

Back by Popular Demand:
Two of Our Favorite Winter Comfort Foods

It’s no secret that many people tend to put on some pounds during the winter. Part of this is due to the extravagant spreads we put out during the holidays when we’re entertaining family and guests. But some of it is also due to our innate craving for “comfort foods” during the long winter months. As the daylight wanes and the darkness waxes, the temperatures drop and our willpower lapses - we instinctively turn to foods that are high in carbs and calories.

While I’ve often heard that this is a throwback to the days when our species were all hunters and gatherers that needed to put on layers of fat to survive the winter, many nutritionists now say it’s quite a bit simpler than that. When we feel cold, they tell us, Mother Nature makes our bodies instinctively crave foods that will help us heat up fast - and those carb and fat-rich comfort foods give us plenty of fuel to burn in order to heat our bodies up rapidly.

Well, who am I to fight Mother Nature? I figure that if Derek and I can fight the urge to overdo it - it’s quite nice to indulge in a few comfort foods now and then. And as long as we balance such dishes with other, less carb-heavy meals, and keep up on our exercise levels - we’ll get through another winter without gaining any extra pounds.

So with all that in mind, I offer the recipes for two of our favorite comfort foods.

This first recipe makes about 8 cups of one of my family’s all time favorite holiday concoctions: Leek and Potato Soup. If you’ve never tried it, this luxuriously delicious soup is actually pretty easy to make and it’s very, very, very good, so you absolutely must try it at least once.

Despite the fact that they sometimes giggle themselves onto the floor when they hear the name Leek and Potato Soup, I’ve found that if they bring themselves to try it, most kids really like it! But if you think the name might get in the way of enticing your kids to try it, you can always call it Vichysoisse (visheeSWOZZ) ...not that it helps all that much to do so - and there’s the risk that some smart aleck kid might proclaim that they’d heard that Vichysoisse is supposed to be served cold ... which, in my experience, will elicit several exclamations of “Ewwww!” ...but I digress.

Leek and Potato Soup is a simple soup made using a few ingredients: 3 tablespoons of butter, the white portion of 8 leeks, 3 medium russet potatoes, 5 cups of chicken stock, 1/2-1 full cup of cream, half & half, or whole milk, and salt, pepper, and fresh or freeze dried chives to taste.
Dining with the Dudleys

In a wide and heavy-bottomed soup pot over a low to medium heat, melt the butter and add the leeks, finely chopped. Make sure you use only the white portions of the leeks and that you’ve rinsed all of the sand out of them. Cook the leeks in the butter for about 20 minutes until they are tender, but not browned, and then stir in the peeled and thinly sliced russet potatoes. Add to this the chicken stock and let it all come to a boil.

Once it has come to a boil, immediately reduce the heat to low and let it simmer slowly, covered, stirring frequently for about 30 minutes or until the potatoes are soft. Puree the soup in a food processor or blender or by pushing it through a sieve until it's smooth and lump-free. If it needs salt, add it now along with some crushed black pepper and chives.

Into the seasoned soup, stir 1/2 cup to a full cup of cream, half & half or whole milk depending on how rich you want the soup to be. Once the soup is stirred, carefully reheat it without allowing it to boil or burn. If you think it's too thick, add a little stock but bear in mind it should be velvety smooth and creamy. Correct the seasonings and once you're happy with it, the soup is ready to serve, Enjoy!

The next recipe, for Mujadara (mooJAHdruh), is even simpler to prepare. But as with Leek and Potato Soup, it’s one of those side dishes that is far greater than the sum of its parts. And despite the fact that it is still a comfort food (or at least it is in our opinion) it’s actually quite a bit better for you than most comfort foods. While it still has plenty of carbs and fats, it also has a good amount of fiber, protein and heart healthy monounsaturated fatty acids as well.

Derek and I were first introduced to this wonderful and popular Lebanese dish when we visited Lazizah Bakery in Yantic. We were so impressed with Lazizah that I wrote about it in the August, 2015 issue of the Post Road Review.

As we found ourselves going back there more and more often - and always coming home with their mujadara, I was inspired to try to find a recipe for it and make it on my own at home. I’m sure you’ve heard the saying, “there are as many recipes for XXXXX as there are cooks making it.” Well, mujadara is one of those dishes. You can find recipes online for it that range wildly in complexity and in the number of ingredients. I was amazed, however, when, through trial and error - and after using all sorts of different recipes - I found that we preferred the simplest recipe - a recipe without any spices in it at all.

To make Mujadara, all you will need are the following ingredients: 2 very large yellow onions, 2 cups of dried brown lentils, 1 cup of basmati rice, 1/2 cup of extra virgin olive oil, 1.5 cups of cold water, salt to taste - and an optional garnish of plain Greek yogurt when served. You’ll also need a couple of hours but don’t worry, most of this time is spent doing other stuff and peeking in on the onions from time to time to make sure they don’t burn.

The first step is to peel and slice the onions, crosswise, as thinly and uniformly as you can. You want onion rings which are no thicker than 1/8 inch. I use my trusty old Borner V-Slicer mandoline set at the thinnest slice possible and it really makes short work of it - producing a pile of whisper thin onion rings in a few short minutes.

Once you have your onions sliced, pour 1/2 cup of extra virgin olive oil into a covered sauté pan or skillet that’s large enough at least to hold all of the onions. I use a 4 quart sauté pan with a glass cover for this - as I can make most of the dish using that one pan and the glass cover lets me keep an eye on the progress as it cooks.
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When the oil is fragrant, add the onions, put the lid on the pot and with the burner on the lowest setting, let the onions cook down, stirring them as needed, until they’re brown and caramelized but not scorched. This can take quite a while, so be patient.

While your onions are cooking, measure your lentils, sort out any dirt and stones and wash them under cold running water. Then dump your washed lentils in a sauce pan and cover with cold water by at least an inch. Bring the pan up to a boil then reduce the heat to a low medium and simmer the lentils until they’re just short of being done - about 15-20 minutes. I like the lentils to have a slight bit of crunch at this point as they’re going to be cooked another 15 minutes or so along with the rice. Once the lentils are cooked enough, strain them through a colander and rinse them in cold water to stop them from cooking until it’s time to add them back into the recipe.

As your lentils cook, measure out your basmati rice and pour it into a large shallow stainless steel mixing bowl. Run the bowl under a stream of cold water and swirl it around. You want to rinse, swirl, and carefully pour off the water - repeating the process until the rice no longer turns the water cloudy. Then pour the rice into a fine sieve and set it aside until your onions are nicely and uniformly browned.

Take heart - once the onions are done, you only have to wait about 25 minutes longer before it’s ready to eat.

The next step is to reserve about half of your caramelized onions in a separate bowl, then pour the rinsed rice into the pan with the remainder of the onions and gently stir the grains around letting them soak up the oil a bit. Then add your pre-cooked lentils and stir again, gently, you don’t want to break up the rice. Once the rice and lentils are well combined, add the water, gently press the lentils and rice down evenly all around the pan with a wooden spoon, cover the pan and crank the burner up to high. You’re not going to see all that much water, but watch it. When you see bubbles rising up it means that water is boiling and it’s time to turn the heat down to low.

Cook the mujadara over a low heat for 15 minutes then fluff it all up thoroughly but gently. Then take the pan off the heat. You’re likely to see that some of the rice is not yet fully cooked but don’t worry - just leave it covered for another 5-10 minutes to steam the rice to finish. After it’s done, salt the mujadara to taste, dole it out into your serving bowl or tray, and cover it with the reserved caramelized onions that you set aside earlier.

This dish goes well with a dollop of plain Greek yogurt served alongside it on the plate. But I don’t mix the two together - I just dip my fork into the yogurt lightly before I scoop up some delicious, and relatively guilt-free mujadara.
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PET ALLERGIES

Is it true that poodles, and other breeds who don't shed, are less likely to cause allergic reactions? Many people believe that because of this misconception that it is animal dander (hair and skin cells) that cause allergies. It's actually proteins in the animal's saliva and from skin oil glands that cause these reactions in sensitive people.

Dogs and especially cats groom themselves by licking their hair, paws and other anatomic regions. The saliva dries allowing small particles containing the protein filled material to drop off or become airborne. If you have a dog or cat, then you are guaranteed to have these protein particles on the floor, in carpets, in furniture, drapes, and airborne whenever these articles are touched, sat on, or walked on. If you have no allergies, not to worry, since this is not unhealthy.

For those who do have pet-associated allergies, this often results in a full-blown reaction of your immune system to these foreign proteins. The body sees this as an invasion of a foreign organism and mounts an attack to expel it. The result is sneezing, watery eyes, runny nose and, in especially sensitive people, asthma and difficulty breathing.

If you are allergic, there is no such animal as a non-allergic breed. Poodles and even hairless breeds produce saliva. It is possible that a species change from cats to dogs might make a difference, but changing from one breed of dog to another is unlikely to help.

Cats are more likely than dogs to cause reactions, partially because they groom themselves more often. Their saliva is more sticky, allowing the proteins to become more widespread and stay on more surfaces. Sensitive sufferers may also react to other animals, whether kept as pets or unwanted guests, such as mice, hamsters, birds and even roaches. Pet owners may unwittingly carry these allergens into other homes on hair and articles of clothing.

If you have pet allergies, but are determined to keep your pet, there are some things you can try. Keep the animal out of the bedroom. Minimize or eliminate carpets and heavily upholstered furniture. Try micro-filtration bags on your vacuum cleaner to trap small particles, or consider upgrading to a vacuum with a HEPA (high-efficiency particle arresting) filter. If you have a dog, bathe it or have it bathed once a week. Bathing cats is not likely to help much, and is likely to cause loss of skin (yours, not the cat's).

Allergy shots have been tried, but have not been very effective. The protein of cat allergens has been completely identified, so a vaccine some time in the future is a possibility. For now, sensitive people often have a difficult choice to make, to breathe or to keep the pet. Come to think of it, maybe that's not so hard a choice after all.

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ARIES (March 20 - April 19) As we approach the conclusion of another year, the motion of the Red Planet continues to dominate your attention. At least one Aries of my acquaintance actually looked forward to this planet's stay: it is your planetary ruler and that must be a good thing, right? But Mars demands a lot of energy and conflict is never far away. It arrived in your constellation in June and remains until the first week of January. This is far longer than usual, while two months were spent retrograde, rendering it especially hard to see any progress at all. Now, splendid aspects during December offer you a chance to make up for lost time.

TAURUS (April 20 - May 20) Arguably, the only constant is change. There are two ways to approach this thorny issue: firstly by kicking and screaming while trying to hold on to situations that have clearly known better days. Secondly, despite your resistance and apparent successes since last August, you can honestly acknowledge there is some scope for improvement. With Uranus moving forward in your sign next month, it would be better to pre-empt the issue. If possible, where you feel that circumstances and situations are cramping your style, try to initiate subtle alterations for yourself rather than waiting for possibly a less opportune moment.

GEMINI (May 21 - June 20) So what does the total solar eclipse on December 14 have to do with you? Unless you live in Argentina or Chile of course, where weather conditions could in any case, prove disappointing. Well, eclipses arrive in pairs: one solar and one lunar two weeks apart, with a few subtle variations on this theme. The lunar eclipse came at the end of November when you decided that certain people ought to get a piece of your mind, if only you knew what that was. This lead to awkward scenarios where you said something you didn’t mean. But now as Venus enters your opposite sign the very next day, you have a chance to calm the waters.

CANCER (June 20 - July 22) Much activity occurs towards the western horizon of your horoscope, an area that puts other people’s interests in high focus. While this has been true for a while, the atmosphere is altering and evolving with more pleasant trends on the way. Both Jupiter and Saturn change signs within a couple of days of one another. This is a rare occurrence and points the way towards less difficult times than we’ve been experiencing of late. For some, the idea of commitment will be high on the agenda, but don’t be in too much rush to force the issue. Have fun, relish the ride and remember, all relationships need a roadmap sometimes.

LEO (July 23 - August 22) Where you have been working hard to carve out a niche for yourself, professionally or in the way you are perceived by your compatriots and contemporaries, then the planetary machinations of December herald an inkling of the rewards you’ve been struggling hard towards. Meteoric results are not on the cards: the planets involved never work that way. And the results are the more lasting for this reason. You may be aided and abetted by those of different ages, ethnicities, nationalities, religions or cultural backgrounds. Don’t be too trusting of everyone you meet, certain folks are envious of your successes.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 - Sept. 22) The influence of other people dominates your affairs. In itself this can be rewarding, reassuring and happy business, especially at home, within your family, with parents and children, even your colleagues at work. But certain individuals continue to prove elusive and unfortunately this unsettles you a lot. You are never quite sure where you stand with them. So you veer between overt outrage to subterfuge and even blaming yourself in order to express your disappointment. Plus, there is always just so much to do. Some of their ideas seem so off the planet, you feel that you need to lend a guiding hand.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 - Oct. 22) In your bubble the world continues. You can do what you like, see who you choose, eat what you please and listen to the information you want to hear. In this safe environment nobody hurts, no one has suffered an injustice, no lies have been propagated, nobody pretended to be what they are not. You are aware you have made sacrifices to achieve this state of security but you’ve picked your options and still are not keen on the alternative. Opening your soul to another always involves an element of risk. It’s how you compare the value to the downside; so much depends on your age and future expectations.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21) Jupiter and Saturn arrive in the bottommost sector of the firmament. These are big planets and are not to be treated lightly. This region of the sky represents your home life and family affairs, plus the way your deepest emotional needs are reflected by this environment. Jupiter takes twelve years to circuit the zodiac and often means an upward move of residence to a better area or more congenial surroundings. Saturn requires more like three decades, so to have the combined influence of these planets together is very unusual. Maybe money will be tight, or you’ll have your work cut out to bring your new abode up to scratch?

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21) A solar eclipse will be seen across South America on December 14. Folks will catch totality from Chile and Argentina with the smart money on Eastern Argentina, weather permitting. Just 24 hours later, Venus also descends on your sign, where it will remain until the second week of January. Combined with Mercury’s arrival on December 1 and your birthday around now, you’re in a much better position than for some while. Expand your horizons and take a different view. Exotic travel doesn’t have to cost a fortune. An informal or structured education, is ideally entirely free.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 - Jan. 19) The party’s over but you must have been doing something right as the cosmos lets you down gently, through to February if you’re lucky. But that’s it and you’re reminded how mystics once intoned that karma is only a bitch if you are. Where you have behaved correctly, done things right, lived up to your responsibilities as a friend, parent or a regular human being - then the cosmos rewards you in the only way you truly understand, cash money. Where your obligations have been dodged, those in need have been avoided and relationships were discarded with no mind for the pain caused, then you’re going to appreciate this too.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18) During December you start to realise why you’ve been so down on your luck. A new cycle is beginning and the only way this could ever happen is for the circumstances of your old life to be blown to smithereens. You’d never have accepted this consciously but the universe or God’s Will if you prefer, knows what is good for you - better than you do from your limited perspective. It won’t always be a laugh a minute and it’ll certainly be a bunch of hard work, but take a long-term perspective and look towards your future. Maturity and perseverance are favoured, as are creating your own opportunities and opening the door.

PISCES (Feb. 19 - March 19) Neptune is your ruling planet. Some astrologers still say it’s Jupiter; after all it hasn’t been long since 1846 to include another planet. But you’re a more complicated character. On a good day you’re intuitive, kind and empathetic; the best companion anyone could have and more besides. But remember the two fish of your symbol, swimming in contrary directions? You are a cosmic chameleon and if you want, you’ll be whatever anybody needs. If your intentions remain pure then fine. But if you’re tempted towards manipulation or deviousness, don’t sport the brazen hide of Jupiter to carry this off indefinitely...

By Paul Wade
- The Astrology Wizard

Paul Wade, a UK-based astrologer, is published in seven languages.

For weekly and annual horoscopes, services, information, freebies and more, visit www.astrologywizard.com.
Red Cross and Country Music Star Martina McBride Urge Americans to Give Blood

The American Red Cross and country music star Martina McBride have joined together this holiday season to remind people to take care of one another, sharing comfort and joy with hospital patients through the gift of blood donation. Health emergencies don’t pause for a pandemic or holiday celebrations. The Red Cross needs the help of blood donors across the country now to ensure patients continue to have access to lifesaving blood.

As the U.S. experiences a new surge in COVID-19 cases, the Red Cross is becoming increasingly concerned about the nation’s blood supply— including convalescent plasma. A convalescent plasma donation collects plasma from COVID-19 survivors because antibodies to the disease in their blood may help patients who are currently fighting the virus. Increased hospitalization of patients with coronavirus this fall and winter has caused the Red Cross to distribute a record number of COVID-19 plasma products to hospitals treating patients who are battling the virus.

This holiday season, Martina McBride is reaching out to country music fans and all eligible individuals, “If nobody has ever asked you to give blood before, I’m asking you to give blood—especially during this trying time.”

As a thank-you for helping meet the need for blood donations from Nov. 15 through Dec. 15, Suburban Propane is offering blood, platelet and plasma donors a chance to win an Outdoor Living Experience, powered by Propane, to enable a lucky winner to enjoy socially distanced celebrations with family and friends this holiday season. The prize includes a propane-powered pizza oven, fire pit, outdoor heater and stipend towards propane.*

“Through our SuburbanCares initiative, giving back to our local communities is a top priority, and what better way to do that than to donate blood. Suburban is delighted to sponsor a Propane Experience Giveaway to help motivate more people to give the gift of life this holiday season,” said Nandini Sankara, spokesperson for Suburban Propane.

Eligible individuals are urged to make an appointment to donate blood now to help patients in need. Find a donation opportunity using the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting RedCrossBlood.org or calling 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767).

“Giving comfort to patients by providing lifesaving blood products is fundamental to the Red Cross mission. However, it’s not possible without the support of generous blood donors and dedicated partners, like Martina McBride and Suburban Propane,” said Paul Sullivan, senior vice president at the Red Cross. “While we have certainly experienced unparalleled hardships this year, we have also witnessed great acts of kindness—like COVID-19 survivors rolling up their sleeves to share their antibodies with patients battling the illness. Donating blood, plasma or platelets is an act of kindness that truly makes a lifesaving difference.”

Lacy Atkinson is a 37-year-old COVID-19 survivor, in part thanks to a stranger who rolled up their sleeves to donate convalescent plasma and help her body fight back. Atkinson’s life was turned upside down when she was hospitalized for COVID-19 in September.

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During her stay, infectious disease doctors tried multiple treatments to help her recover with limited success – but she just wasn’t getting better.

“My oxygen levels were still low, and I had severe pneumonia in both my lungs,” Atkinson said.

Desperate to help her, doctors offered the one treatment they had left: convalescent plasma. Thankfully, this treatment helped her recover.

“I felt such gratitude for the donor who helped me beat COVID. I have a husband, two kids and three dogs that I desperately wanted to get home to. I have a lot of life left to live! I’m so thankful that plasma was available when I needed it.”

The Red Cross is testing all blood donations for COVID-19 antibodies which helps provide insight to donors concerning possible prior exposure to this virus. Donors can expect to receive the results of their antibody test within one to two weeks through our Red Cross Blood Donor App or on the donor portal at RedCrossBlood.org. As part of this effort, plasma from whole blood donations that test positive for COVID-19 antibodies may now help current coronavirus patients in need of convalescent plasma. Each week, whole blood donors with COVID-19 antibodies are helping to contribute between 350-500 units of potentially lifesaving convalescent plasma for patients in need.

The Red Cross is not administering diagnostic tests intended to diagnose illness. As such, to protect the health and safety of our staff and donors, it is important that individuals who do not feel well or believe they may be ill with COVID-19 postpone donation.

Each Red Cross blood drive and donation center follows the highest standards of safety and infection control, and additional precautions – including temperature checks, social distancing and face coverings for donors and staff – have been implemented to help protect the health of all those in attendance. Donors are asked to schedule an appointment prior to arriving at the drive and are required to wear a face covering or mask while at the drive, in alignment with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention public guidance.

All blood types are needed to ensure a reliable supply for patients. A blood donor card or driver’s license or two other forms of identification are required at check-in. Individuals who are 17 years of age in most states (16 with parental consent where allowed by state law), weigh at least 110 pounds and are in generally good health may be eligible to donate blood. High school students and other donors 18 years of age and younger also have to meet certain height and weight requirements. Blood and platelet donors can save time at their next donation by using RapidPass® to complete their pre-donation reading and health history questionnaire online, on the day of their donation, before arriving at the blood drive. To get started, follow the instructions at RedCrossBlood.org/RapidPass or use the Blood Donor App.

The American Red Cross shelters, feeds and provides emotional support to victims of disasters; supplies about 40% of the nation’s blood; teaches skills that save lives; provides international humanitarian aid; and supports military members and their families. The Red Cross is a not-for-profit organization that depends on volunteers and the generosity of the American public to perform its mission. For more information, please visit redcross.org or cruzrojaamericana.org, or visit them on Twitter at @RedCross.

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Poinsettias are by far, the most common plant associated with the Christmas holidays. Despite some nasty rumors about them, poinsettias make the perfect hostess gift, and fill homes with beautiful, festive color. They are relatively easy to maintain and the available color range has expanded in the last several years. Poinsettias can now be found in Ivory/White, Pink, Red, and Burgundy, several bicolors as well as with ruffled petals. Florists can also use some spray-on color to change color to orange, blue, or even purple. Add a little glitter, and these are NOT your grandmothers’ poinsettias.

Poinsettias should be kept in a bright room, close to a sunny window, out of drafts. They are tropical plants and should be maintained at 65-75 degrees in the day, with nighttime temperatures down to no less than 60 degrees. They should be watered when the soil is dry to the touch, but be sure to NOT let the plant sit in water.

Contrary to the fact that over 60% of Americans think that poinsettias are poisonous, they are not. Poinsettias are however, extremely bitter tasting, and it is highly unlikely that a child or pet would take more than a bite or two. A mouthful is a far cry from the approximately 1.25 lbs of poinsettia bracts (over 500 leaves) that a 50 pound child would have to eat to exceed the experimental doses according to POISINDEX Information Service. In addition, the American Medical Association’s Handbook of Poisonous and Injurious Plants only lists occasional vomiting after eating poinsettias for side effects. However, Poinsettias belong to the genus Euphorbia, which does include several varieties that are toxic. This may have helped to promote the false idea that poinsettias are poisonous. So, although eating a few leaves from your favorite Christmas plant may make you sick, it will not kill you. And again, most pets and small children will taste the nasty, bitter leaf and stop eating.

Mistletoe is another common Christmas plant and this one is poisonous - but it’s only the berries that carry the toxins - which is why most preserved mistletoe is sold with artificial berries.

Much more dangerous, however, is the Christmas tree - especially if they’re dried out. To ensure that you have a safe and happy holiday season, be sure to take a few steps to keep your Christmas trees fresh while in the house. When purchasing a tree, ask for a “fresh cut”. This cut can be as little as an inch cut off the bottom of the tree but it allows the tree to readily absorb water. If you are not going to set the tree up when you get it home, be sure to get it into warm water immediately.

There are several different additives that you can make or purchase to add to water that supposedly extends the life of the tree. My experience is that as long as you refill the reservoir with water each day, your tree will last for the entire holiday season.

The variety of tree that you purchase or cut down also makes a difference. Fraser firs seem to last the longest, but as long as you are diligent with the water, any fresh cut tree should last through the holiday season.

Letting your tree dry out can be dangerous in that a dried Christmas tree can go up in flames very quickly. Another common sense safety hint – do not leave your tree lights on overnight. Here’s wishing everyone a safe and happy holiday season.
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