

A boozy year in review

SAN DIEGO

VOL. 45 | NO. 52 | DECEMBER 24, 2020

Reader

ALONE
FOR THE
HOLIDAYS

Editor's picks from this week's free classified ads

More in the back of this issue

I'M NOT PERFECT but my merits outweigh my flaws. A geek of many genres. Like Socrates if he had been into Sci-Fi.
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LETTERS

We welcome letters pertaining to the contents of the Reader. Submit them at sreader.com/letters or phone them in at 619-235-3000. Include your name and neighborhood. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Attack of the 30-foot RVs

30-foot-plus RVs and trailers have gotten out of control around Mission Bay! ("San Diego cracks down on anyone living in his car," Cover Stories, December 16) The city should have made a stipulation when they gave the campground area in De Anza Cove to Campland that they should have some affordable spots not just the ones that go for \$100 a night spots. There is also a huge lot on Seaworld Drive in old Pacific Coast Highway that has nothing on it at all and is fenced in and they could open that up and let the people park their RVs there also There is also a huge lot on Seaworld Drive in old Pacific Coast Highway that has nothing on it at all and is fenced in and they could open that up and let the people park their RVs there also. But the people in the RVs need to clean their acts up a bit. Nobody wants to look at a bunch of vehicles look like they came out of the *Grapes of Wrath*.

Joseph Savage
Pacific Beach

Mother of a zoo


Over the past three years, I've been researching and writing a book for the Zoo about the remarkable Belle Benchley, who ran the San Diego Zoo from 1927 to 1953 as the first and only woman zoo director in the world ("Boo for the Zoo," Cover Stories, December 3). As the face and voice of the Zoo, Belle made thousands of speeches to civic and school groups, wrote and edited ZOOOOZ for its first 20 years, appeared on radio shows and in news reels, and wrote four books, two of them best sellers, all

while also managing the Zoo. As she often said, "A zoo is never finished. There are always improvements, changes, and new ideas and exhibitions. A zoo is a living thing which will continue to evolve and grow."

As disheartening as it is for Thomas Arnold to no longer see the same exhibits, or animals displayed in the same way today as they were in his childhood, change is inevitable and necessary. Improvements arise naturally with more knowledge. In the 1920s and 1930s, the infant San Diego Zoo was considered an upstart radical by the established Eastern zoos for being the first American zoo to use bar-less moats to display animals. Another innovation was to acquire a male and female or two, instead of just a single animal, so that the animals had companionship and a family unit could form.

The San Diego Zoo quickly became known as the "nursery" of all zoos for the proliferation of offspring every year, a viable sign of contented, healthy animals. Belle wished that every Zoo visitor would just pause, be patient, and spend time quietly watching the animals being themselves. Through-

continued on page 4



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December 24, 2020



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NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

By Reader stringers

HILLCREST Unpaid rent no laughing matter Finest City Improv needs punchlines, not deadlines

Sara Johansen says improv comedy classes are the best way she knows for the introverted to meet other people. “I had just moved to San Diego a year earlier and I found it very hard to make friends. I had just gone through a bad divorce.” She says she took a chance with Finest City Improv and found that extemporaneous team efforts to pretend that you are riding kittens in outer space provide a rare bonding opportunity. “It was the best feeling I ever experienced...All my friends came from there.”

“It changed my life,” says Skyler Davis Lee. “I’ve met all my best friends here. Before that, I didn’t know anyone in San Diego. I never



Evicted during a pandemic? You can't make this stuff up!

thought I’d be here five years later.” Lee, who is now Finest City Improv’s general manager, helped oversee some \$17,000 in electrical, structural and disability improvements to the building that houses it. He built out the beer and wine bar. “Now that’s it’s ready, no one gets to use it.”

Finest City Improv is a combination comedy venue and comedy school where performers take six different levels of two-month classes to learn how to create comedy scenes with no props. While places like the National

Comedy Theater school on India Street focus on creating short skits *a la Whose Line is it Anyway*, Finest City Improv students focus on long-form improvisation. Think one-act plays created out of thin air. Amy Lisewski founded the outfit at the Lafayette Hotel in 2012, but says she started looking elsewhere when her rent there was increased by 50 percent. She says the city of San Diego made it hard to find a new home. “Most commercial real estate is either zoned retail or office. There are very few places that can be permitted for assembly.” Her 2200-square-foot space at 3746 6th Avenue has a maximum legal capacity of 49.

Like other comedy venues, Finest City Improv went dark with the virus. But

after paying full rent for five months, the Hillcrest comedy venue/school was given a pay-up-or-quit ultimatum that Johansen, Lee and Lisewski fear may permanently kill the

“The story about Hillcrest is about how a number of property owners have stepped up to help save their tenants.”

laughter. “We paid 100 percent of our rent (\$4300) each month, April through August,” says Lisewski. “I told the landlord we were paying it even though we were really only paying for storage space. He didn’t seem to show any concern for the fact that we couldn’t open and operate as usual. We have been getting ten percent of our usual revenue since March. Meanwhile, I have to pay taxes and insurance. Then the day after Thanksgiving, we were given a notice to pay or leave in three days.” Worse,

Lisewski says the landlord is demanding that the place be returned to its original state. “We spent like \$7000 for an architect just so we could get our beer and wine license. We fixed a multitude of issues that the city required.” Lisewski says covid has everyone in a bind. “There is no way anyone can operate until at least next spring. We went to our community with a Go Fund Me campaign. Now we have to pay lawyers thousands to try and save what we have.”

“It was huge having them in the neighborhood,” says Benjamin Nichols, executive director of the Hillcrest Business Association. “The true sign of a diverse neighborhood is live venues. We used to have three in Hillcrest. Martinis Above Fourth was around for

decades. When they closed, that was a huge loss. And The Merrow, I assume, is still open, but it hasn’t had live music for months. A comedy club or comedy school is an attraction for the entire community. If Finest City Improv goes away, that will be a tragedy,” Nichols says many landlords in Hillcrest act as partners to make sure their tenant businesses can survive. “The story about Hillcrest is about how a number of property owners have stepped up to help save their tenants. I know of some landlords that have covered rents through the entire covid period.” He says that while some of the “big boys,” including the Cohn Restaurant Group, have closed eateries in Hillcrest (Tacos Libertad and BO-beau Kitchen and Cache) a number of independent bars and cafes are thriving in the midst of pandemic, thanks to their landlords. “Uptown Tavern, Baja Betty’s, and Number 1 Fifth Avenue have learned how to adapt. Breakfast Bitch goes crazy on the weekends. And their landlords, who are actually acting as partners, are part of the answer.” But, he warns, “Landlords can

be shortsighted in this environment when they force out a tenant as unique as Finest City Improv. They may end up with a crappy tenant.”

There are currently four commercial



vacancies, directly across the street from Finest City Improv on the 3700 block of 6th Avenue.

A call to Finest City’s landlord, Dr. Iman Mikhail, was not returned.

KEN LEIGHTON

ROSARITO It takes a village to fight a fire

Five-headed blaze brings out Baja’s best

On December 10, extreme Santa Ana winds reaching up to 60 miles per hour around Tijuana, Tecate, and Rosarito fanned wildfires that consumed four large ranches, according to Civil Protection of Baja California. One of

continued on page 6



Sweet Puppy



Jackie: Brandon Hensgens (White Shirt), Joel Arriola (black shirt)

San Diego Gas & Elections

Power company went on Dem bender

A torrent of October campaign cash accompanying San Diego Gas & Electric's sole bid to remain the city's exclusive gas and electricity supplier for the next two decades is likely to carry the day for the Sempra Energy-owned utility, say skeptics of the proceedings. "The mayor may reject (the bids), he may cancel the process entirely, he may make recommendations for award of any responsive bid," mayoral chief of policy Jessica Lawrence told the city council at the December 17 franchise bid opening.

With the final say technically up to the city council, talk of a city takeover of the utility or a year-long extension of SDG&E's expiring 50-year deal to come up with fresh bidders is in the air. But Sempra's cascade of campaign cash, which disclosures show ultimately benefited certain Democrats, including mayor-elect Gloria, could strongly influence the outcome in favor of SDG&E. California campaign disclosure filings show that Sempra's contributions grew sizably in the weeks leading up to the November 3 election. The San Diego County Democratic Party got \$15,000 from Sempra on September 10, and the local party received \$5000 more from Sempra on October 15, for a total of \$20,000. In turn, the county party became a significant source of campaign funding for hand-picked city council hopefuls, including Marni von Wilpert for City Council 2020 (\$7935, October 14), Raul Campillo for City Council District 7 2020 (\$1895, October 16 and \$9068, October 6), and Steve Whitburn for City Council 2020 (\$5661, October 6).

On October 15, Sempra kicked in \$25,000 to the Sacramento-based LGBT Caucus



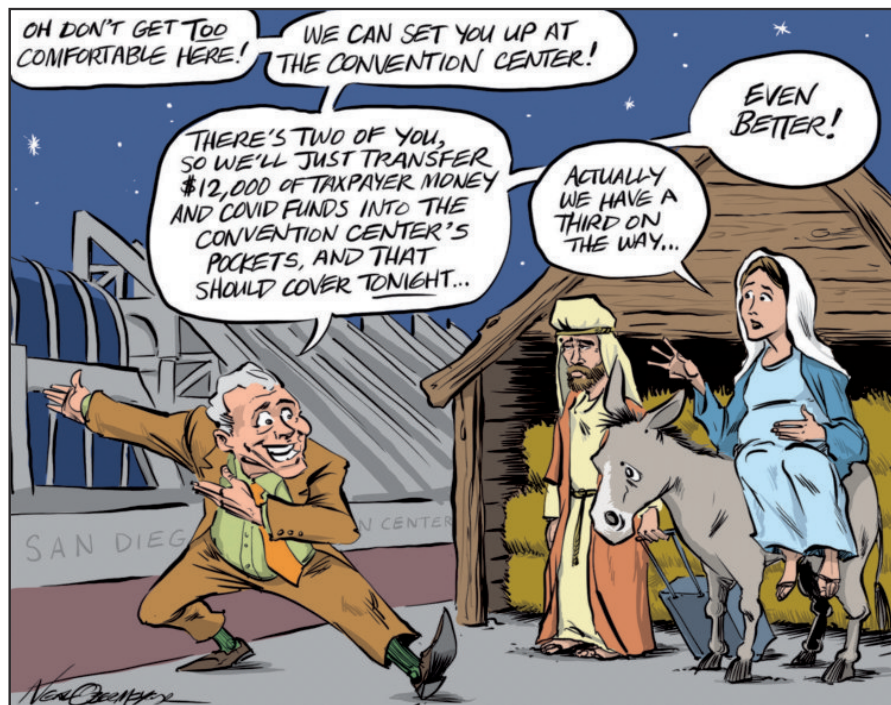
That oughta teach Bry to ever talk about working with the opposition! And the same goes for the rest of you bums!

Leadership Fund, which on October 1 gave \$50,000 and on October 16 an additional \$30,000, for a total of \$80,000, to Neighbors for Housing Solutions Supporting Todd Gloria for San Diego Mayor 2020. As previously reported, that group raised more than \$1.3 million for a last-minute flurry of hit pieces against Gloria's foe and fellow Democrat Barbara Bry, linking her to the policies of Donald Trump and local elected Republicans.

San Diego Works, a political action committee run by the San Diego Imperial Counties Labor Council AFL CIO, that largely backs Democratic candidates, received \$20,000 from Sempra on October 2. In turn, San Diego Works came up with \$50,000 for Neighbors for Housing Solutions on October 26. And the San Diego County Regional Chamber of Commerce, whose PAC gave Neighbors for Housing Solutions \$80,000 on September 29, got \$10,000 from Sempra on October 9.

Matt Potter

Neal Obermeyer



UNDER THE RADAR

KPBS donor sick-out It's been a bad year for the KPBS broadcasting stations, the public television and FM radio operation run by San Diego State University, per a newly released financial statement and report for the fiscal year ending this past June by accountant **Grant Thornton**. Direct "financial costs of COVID-19 for KPBS totaled approximately \$835,000 and include Underwriting and Membership cancellations, operational expense increases and capital equipment expenditures," says the November 20 report. "Such costs were partially offset by a \$275,000 unrestricted grant distributed by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, which was signed into law on March 27, 2020."

Thornton reports KPBS "quickly moved to telework mid-March 2020 along with the majority of faculty and staff at the San Diego State University campus. This necessitated the Stations to purchase and install additional computer equipment and customize broadcast/production solutions, to allow staff to work remotely in an efficient manner in order to continue services to the greater San Diego community." The report adds that despite pandemic impacts, the stations' overall net financial position grew from \$46.7 million as of June 20, 2019, to \$52.4 million in June of this year. The document explains that the boost primarily relates to "realized gifts and pledges for the ongoing KPBS Capital Campaign totaling \$6,250,000 and capitalized construction in progress for the planning and design phase of the Gateway Building renovation and expansion project, offset by depreciation."

On the other hand, 2020 operating revenue plunged from \$52.8 million to \$33.4 million, primarily due to a falloff in contributions from \$48.9 million in Fiscal 2019 to \$29.6 million during the fiscal year ending this past June, the document shows. That appears consistent with a June 22, 2020, *Union-Tribune* account regarding three layoffs and work-time reductions for 15 other station employees. The paper quoted KPBS general manager **Tom Karlo** as saying, "we have experienced a drop in key revenue areas, including underwriting, membership and donor support." The yearly financial transfer from California tax-supported San Diego State University to KPBS rose from \$7.21 million to \$7.72 million. Grants from the federally funded Corporation for Public Broadcasting also increased, going from \$2.81 million to \$3.55 million. Programming and production expenses, which were \$13 million in Fiscal 2019, grew to \$14.2 million in 2020, the report says.

Noisy Shepherds How painful to the ears is a dog bark? That's the question pursued by an environmental review document prepared for San Diego County's proposed 24,000-square-foot animal shelter north of Riverview Parkway and west of North Magnolia Avenue in the city of Santee. "The project would consist of four separate buildings with an internal, secure and open courtyard, an outdoor livestock area, an activity yard, a staff parking lot, and a public parking lot," says the document.

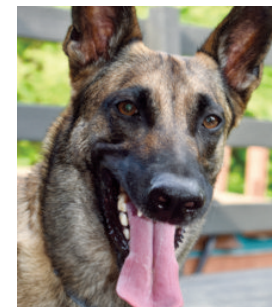


When KPBS's Tom Karlo says, "We've experienced a drop in key revenue areas," he means, "We're going broke."

The so-called Mitigated Negative Declaration was released for public comment December 15. "The project includes 72 indoor dog kennels. Since these kennels are within the building, it is not anticipated that exterior noise levels due to barking dogs within the interior kennels would be a concern."

Outside is another matter, notes the report. "There are two exterior areas where dogs could be located: a dog run area between the west-ern parking lot and buildings, and an activity yard within a secured/fenced area between the four buildings. The primary noise source associated with outdoor activity areas would be periodic dog barking. Usually barking occurs in response to some stimuli, such as persons or other dogs entering the activity areas. The degree of barking depends largely on the experience of the staff, the number of dogs outside at a time, and the amount of stimuli."

Adds the report, "in order to provide a worst-case assessment of dog barking noise levels, the German Shepherd bark noise level of 101 [A-weighted decibels] was utilized for



German Shepherd — the gold standard of dog barking.

this assessment." The report then notes "this maximum noise level would not occur consistently over a 1-hour period, since there are breaks between individual barks and [Department of Animal Services] staff would not allow for consistent and continuous barking. As a worst-case analysis, maximum dog bark noise levels were modeled for 50 percent of a 1-hour period."

Concluded the report: "Noise levels would not exceed the County's property line noise level limits for single-family residential uses. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant." Construction is set to begin next November.

— Matt Potter (@sdmattpotter)

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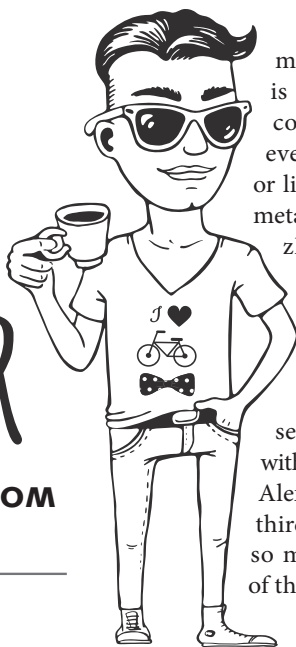
Dear Hipster:

My roommate and I worked our way through a half dozen cans of Steel Reserve the other night while we watched the majority of a new Netflix documentary series about obscure competitions called We Are the Champions. We agreed it's a great show, but we couldn't exactly agree on why, and we spent a huge amount of effort, probably fueled by the Steel Reserve, trying to articulate an intelligible principle that describes why the show works so well where other, similar concepts so often fall flat. For example, you could probably go to any film festival and watch half-a-dozen documentaries about obscure stuff without caring about them, so we can't say it's a virtue of pure randomness, yet that has to be at the heart of it because obscure and unexpected stuff is the most hipster-delightful. Is there a central principle at work there, or is it pure randomness?

— KILLIAN

I know that feeling you're trying to describe, and I agree it's notoriously hard to pin down. It's like wearing Ugg boots and board shorts when the weather is not too cold and not too hot so your snuggly warm feet are perfectly balanced out by the brisk chill of your knees, and you don't care that everybody's giving you side-eye at the office that day.

It's like when somebody tells you there's a band called BABYMETAL. You think it's going to be either (1) actual heavy metal



music for babies, which is almost impossible to conceptualize if you've ever met an actual baby or listened to actual heavy metal; or (2) a kind of Kid-zBop version of heavy metal songs, which is almost painfully easy to conceptualize if you've ever spent more than forty-five seconds around children with access to their parents' Alexa; but in reality it's a third kind of thing that is so much better than both of the other things.

It's the difference between hearing someone describe a

Colombian-style hot dog (a steamed dog playing host to a litany of toppings, including crushed pineapple, mustard, ketchup, mayo, raspberry sauce, and crushed up potato chips), which sounds unworkable; and actually eating a Colombian-style hotdog, which forever revolutionizes your views on hot dogs.

In reality, the magic formula here, the secret sauce, may prove ultimately inscrutable. The French call it the *je ne sais quoi*, which, if you translate it literally, means "I don't know what." That suggests something that by definition resists definition. Some might see this as a cop-out for the intellectually lazy, a means for those who can't be bothered by specificity when enshrining their personal preferences and so appealing to the quasi-mystical quality of being somehow beyond human comprehension.

I disagree. I think that some things in life would be destroyed if they were reduced to anything less than being understood purely on their own terms. In some ways, this basic principle props up all of modern art. People will try, but nobody can really "explain" a Rothko, and any attempt to do so falls far short of a single good look at a scale of 1:1. Some things simply are the way they are, and if you can explain them, it's almost as if you have to explain them; and if you have to explain them, you're missing the point.

— DJ Stevens



Genius is irreducible. Just enjoy.

LETTERS

continued from page 1

out the 1930s and '40s, in an era when most people only saw wild animals as performers in a traveling circus,

Belle appealed to the public in newspaper interviews to not poke, prod or throw rocks at the specimens to make them move. So those "up close and personal engagements with the animals" that Arnold and Christopher Barclay miss have been modified over the years out of necessity for the benefit and protection of the animals as much as for the people.

Beth Wagner Brust
La Jolla

SDSU's textbook fail

Textbook prices have increased by 1,041% since 1977, because a small number of textbook companies have monopolized the market so much that they can raise the prices as they please ("Discount textbook shop forced out at San Diego State," City Lights, August 24, 2016). Students suffer when they do not have access to the materials required to succeed. CALPIRG research suggests that 2 out every 25 students have failed a class due to inability to afford course materials. This is unacceptable.

I find it absolutely appalling that Aztec Shops raised the rent by 32%, preventing KB Shops from staying open and selling textbooks at a discounted price, like they had been doing for over 40 years. Like Appel stated "the original intent of the business was to provide students with alternatives" and now students are in a position to be taken advantage of by the textbooks market.

There are many changes needed to re-shape the US education system to allow everyone to have equal opportunity to succeed in education. We UCSD CALPIRG students are currently working to get the UC Regents to establish

a grant program to incentivize faculty to use open-access resources. This is just one of many steps to take that would benefit millions of students and the communities they serve.

Sky-Lauryn White
La Jolla

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edited for punctuation,
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"Finest City Improv and the unbending landlord" Neighborhood News December 14

I feel bad for the tenants being evicted. Loss of income, and still having to pay rent. The landlords have the right to be paid, but good luck renting to someone else during the pandemic.

—Socks3742

"Patching San Diego curbs is only a patch job" Neighborhood News December 14

The situation with curb "repairs" is so typical of SD. A resident calls for some attention and if anyone responds it's a stroke of luck. Then if anyone actually goes out to look at the situation, it is even less likely. Finally, if the fix is made, it is a patch, not a permanent repair. It is no wonder that La Jollans are taking matters into their own hands with painting curbs red. They don't want the street parking all taken up by visitors and who-knows-who-else, and can get away with it. A smarter approach would be to make the red curb look as official as possible; parking enforcement might just ticket cars that are really legally parked.

—Visduh

"USS Bonhomme Richard to be repurposed as dive- in museum of recent Naval history"

SD on the QT
December 11

Arr, it be a joke, matey....

—Strelnikov

It's Mencken; could it be anything else??

—danfogel

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these ranches was close to the popular hiking route *El Cerro del Coronel* in Primo Tápia in the Playas de Rosarito municipality. It was there that Rodolfo Espinoza Mena, a 25-year-old firefighter with 12 years of experience, worked to put out a fire that threatened a suburban neighborhood. “That day, I had a call from my boss at 7 am to see who could help with this fire. It was my day off, but I went as a volunteer,” Espinoza said. “It isn’t mandatory to go on these calls on our days off, [but] even though we’re paid firefighters, we’ll still go. In our shifts, we work 24 hours straight, and rest 48 hours. For this wildfire, we worked for approximately 15 hours straight.”

Espinoza went prepared with nuts, seeds, oat bran energy bars, and lots of drinking water to help him avoid heat stroke. He noted that the lack of water in these rural areas is their main issue because they must have around 150 gallons to fight the fire. “The ranchers were the ones who gave us water to refill our personal stash. Due to the shortage, we had to use shovels to put out the flames with some earth.” And they had to work strategically, because this was not a normal fire. “Usually, a wildfire has a structure – the back, the sides, and the head, which is the direction the fire is heading. But in this fire, we had it all around us, and it had five heads: behind,



Espinoza- “The ranches were the ones who gave us water to refill our personal stash.”

in front, and in El Coronel itself,” Espinoza added. He said the best firefighting technique is to let certain areas burn and control the expansion of the fire by clearing the land of any flammable material — work that takes hours. “Even leaves blown from trees on fire can start another. Also, animals like wild rats and rabbits. When they catch on fire before dying, they run, and these animals, unfortunately, spread the fires.”

The firefighters’ strategy began to take effect around 6 pm, 19 hours after the fire started on Wednesday – and almost 12 hours after Rodolfo started his shift on his day off. When he arrived back at the station at 7 pm, he and his colleagues had to report any damage to their wildfire combat equipment, and those that volunteered had to prepare

everything to come to work for the next day. Espinoza said that he gets the equivalent of \$554 a month in pay, but sometimes, firefighters have to take from their own pockets to buy safety equipment — helmets, specialized jackets, pants, and boots. Happily, the population they serve and their own families make it up to them by giving moral support, by directly helping to contain wildfires, and by giving them food and water or donating tools to the stations. While they worked on the *Colonel* blaze, people offered them food or left it at the station: handmade burritos with eggs and jam, beans with cheese and meat, sandwiches, and electrolyte drinks. “There are people that write notes on the food like, ‘Take care,’ ‘Your family is waiting for you’ or, ‘We need you,’” said Espinoza. “These

comments help us to deal with the mental or emotional problems we might have. As a second-generation firefighter, my parents are used to the concern of me not coming back. But my mom always thanks God when I return, just as she did with my dad.”

IVÁN MOLINA

MEAN STREETS

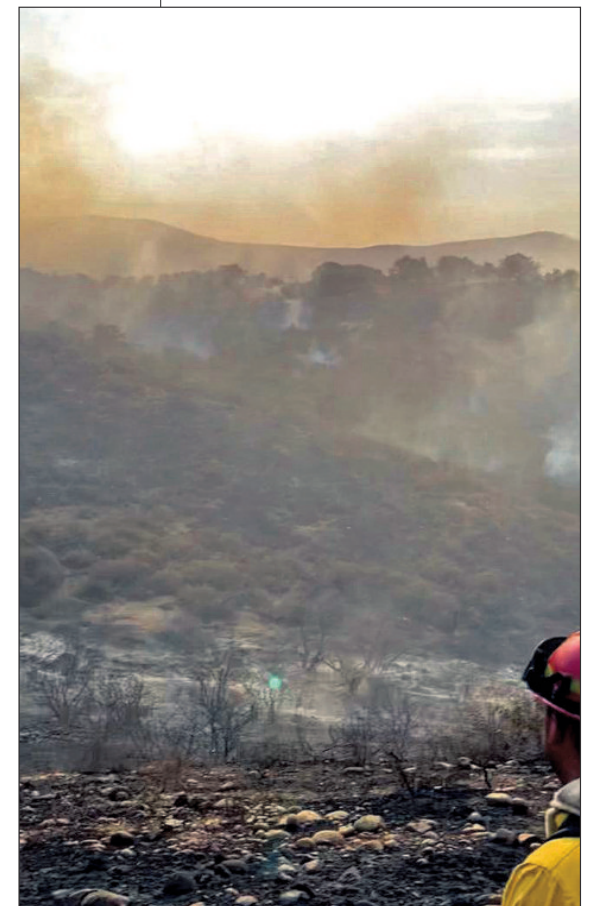
Curb appeals

City shows little enthusiasm for repairs

Over the last 30 days, there were about 210 curb-related reports made on our city’s Get It Done app. Requests for reapplying red paint on pinkish-hued, faded curbs are common. (When motorists park alongside red curbs, their parked vehicles — especially RVs and cargo trucks — block other drivers’ vision as they advance into incoming traffic. Other San Diegans are requesting the exact opposite. “This curb is painted red,” explained a La Jolla dweller on the city’s app on December 14, “presumably by the homeowner, who has also written in white over the illegal red paint, ‘Don’t ever park here,’ repeatedly. The red curb is not near the intersection with Marine Street, so there is no turning radius impact. The distance between driveway aprons, where the curb is painted, is 70 feet in length; the illegal red curb with the white lettering is less than that.”

Three days prior and about 18 miles southeast, a Southcrest local posted: “Illegal

continued on page 8



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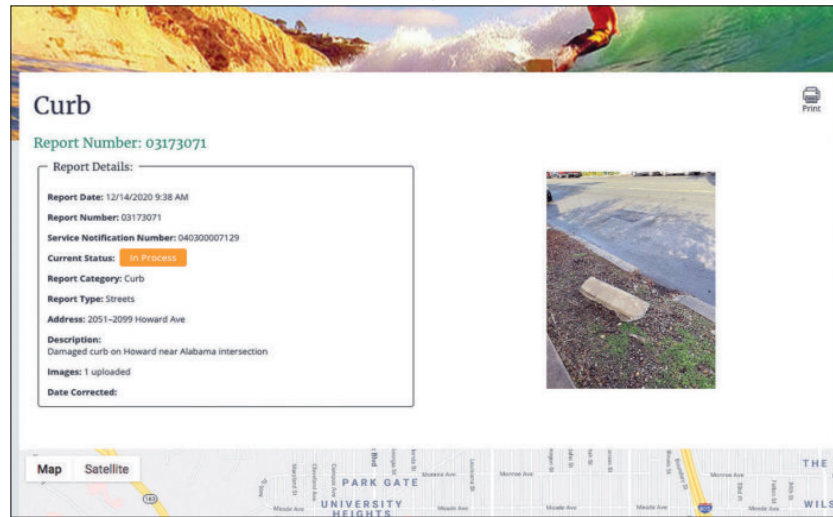


red spray paint on the curb. There has never been any paint on this street corner before, and the neighbor illegally painted it about a month ago so people would not park in front of his house. Another neighbor did it across the street.” (“According to San Diego Police, painting a curb red is a misdemeanor crime of vandalism,” reported ABC 10News in July. “If caught, a person can be cited or arrested.”)

A little personal history: before moving to North Park in 2015, my family lived in Normal Heights between the 15 and 805 freeways south of I-8. Throughout the eight years that we lived around the corner from the Normal Heights sign, I often noticed soil building up on certain streets. “But why?” I wondered. Earlier this month, JP, my former neighbor, answered that lingering question with a Facebook photo. “Six weeks ago, I put in an order regarding my curb,” he wrote to Councilmember Chris Ward. “I was told someone would come out, inspect it, and get back to me, [and] if I heard nothing, I was to call back. I did today (November 30). No one has been out to inspect. A Mr. Richards looked at Google maps photos of my curb from 2019 and



JP’s curb in Normal Heights. “A Mr. Richards looked at Google maps photos of my curb from 2019.”



Complaint about curb on Howard near Alabama.

told me someone would be out to patch my curb, as it did not need replacement. I looked at that picture from almost two years ago, not the same as now. About ten years ago, the city patched this curb, and it did not last. I am sending pictures; the curb that remains is maybe one inch above the pavement. Neighbors on both sides have had their curbs replaced with new curbs. This is not getting it done; most of the curb is gone completely. What a bunch of horse hockey.” A resident commented, “I have to say that we got no satisfaction from Ward when we approached his office repeatedly. Just crickets.”

Mystery solved: the dirty streets came from busted curbs. If the curb is worn away, it seems that after it rains or residents water their yards, the dirt will make its way onto the sidewalks and streets. Other residents on the Get It Done app mentioned similar assessments, and reported various damages: one tripped on curb debris while jogging, while another said she popped her tire pulling up beside a damaged curb.

About a week ago, the city addressed JP’s request. “Two gentlemen came out today and patched my curb. The first thing they said was the curb really needed to be replaced, but their order was to patch. Something they related to the inspection being done using Google maps from three years ago, instead of in person. Some useful information. If you want work done, take pictures, and emphasize the hazard to the elderly people in the neighborhood. They also recommended that I take pictures of their repairs, noting the date, and when the patch falls apart, send in a new work request noting the patch did not work. Lastly, they noted the 50/50 replacement program gets a much quicker response from the city as it saves them money.”

MIKE MADRAGA

BALBOA PARK Cohn-ey Island Is ferris wheel boon or boondoggle?

Earlier this month, the Balboa Park committee voted 7-1 to move forward on a temporary ferris wheel installation in Balboa Park’s Plaza de Panama. The city has not yet had time to approve the installation, but already, a petition in opposition has more than 2600 signatures. The “Balboa Park Star” was proposed in October by both the Cohn Restaurant Group, owner of the Prado Restaurant and Tea Pavilion, and Sky Views of America as a three- to six-month cure for the pandemic blahs. It would occupy 56 x 75 feet of the area between the San Diego Museum of Art and the Timken Museum, offering rides, views, and three-course dining in the sky. The wheel would have 36 enclosed gondolas capable of carrying up to 288 passenger-diners, and would provide night and day “covid-safe” activity. But critics call it a “disfiguring boondoggle.”

Petitioners say the public plaza would be squeezed to make way for 4200 square feet of platform and additional thousands of square feet for safety zones, security, and utility and emergency access. David Lundin, petition starter and president of the Balboa Park Heritage Association, says the 148-foot tall wheel would consume a large portion of the plaza that should be reserved for walkers, bikers and buskers. Charles Kaminski says it’s no place to put a ferris wheel, “Seaport village, Liberty Station, but not in the Plaza de Panama, which was freed of cars and will now be filled again.” The petition also argues that a for-profit ride doesn’t belong on dedicated park lands within the National



Offending La Jolla curb – from Get It Done app.

Historic District, argues the petition. (Each \$16 ticket would allot \$1 to benefit a park fund, and potential discounts may be offered to families, military and seniors.)

Lone dissenter on the park committee Vicki Granowitz agreed that the attraction would take away plaza space from the public, but most committee members disagreed with claims that the wheel is a bad fit for the historic park, which has hosted other temporary installations over the years. There was even



Aren’t the Cohns already big wheels?

a ferris wheel at the 1915 Panama-California Exhibition, said applicant David Cohn, who calls the proposed temporary ride an “observation wheel.” Cohn also said that no other location in the park would work: “It’s just too far away from our kitchens and the Prado restaurant.”

The wheel has approval from the regional airport authority and the FAA, but must still be reviewed by the city attorney’s office and the city’s historic resources board. And the county will have to be back in the covid-19 red tier before permits are secured.

SHEILA PELL

2020, signing off

A few weeks ago, I wrote about a sign that's been cropping up around my neighborhood of late. A few days ago, I spotted a rejoinder. On the one hand, I tend to agree that slogans have a way of blunting the conversation. On the other hand, the beauty of a good slogan is its graceful unity; it's constructed such that you can't take issue with it without looking awkward. *Ackchually, America was already great. Ackchually, all lives matter.* Best to come up with your own pithy bit.

You could even skip the sloganeering and proffer a pamphlet: another neighbor placed a pile of pages offering *Perspective* in their produce basket. *Chew on this, passersby: "Gov't: 4 trillion in stimulus mostly to big corporations and banks, and crumbs for us.*

Estimated 100 million households in America. Four trillion divided by one hundred million equals \$40,000 per household to make it through the Coronavirus. Where is gov't priority? Not us. They divide us through our identity as Republican and Democrat so we never point the finger at the ultra rich as the problem. Let's find common ground with each other and move forward."

(And on the other other hand, it's worth paying attention to that opening phrase: "In this house, we believe..." You can catch a whiff of religiosity from "In this house," the way it echoes Joshua's "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." But it's what follows that really sends the message: "We believe." The sign is a credo, a statement of faith. And how do you argue with faith? I mean, you can come up with plenty of arguments for or against this or that article of a creed, but in the end... well, perhaps there's a reason that "faithful" also



All organic arguments!

means "steadfast.")

Speaking of moving forward: the last of the Trump signs has come down from the houses I pass on my morning walk. Properly speaking, it was a flag, deep blue and almost tasteful. *Trump 2020: Keep America Great.* Less outrageous and confrontational than the *Trump 2020: No More Bullshit* flag that flew from a pole mounted atop the garage that serves as my local polling station. (Less confusing, too; it's hard to run on a "No More X" platform when you're the incumbent.) But that one is down as well. People are still talking about stopping the steal online and on TV, but these folks are done testifying to their immediate neighbors. Not so, the house on the corner with the Biden-Harris banner still stretched across its porch eaves. Political Christmas may have come and gone, but some true believers are keeping the lights on, squeezing all the joy

they can from the season.

Meanwhile, for the rest of us, regular Christmas has arrived. My toddler loves our nighttime tours of the local lights, but she especially loves the 15-foot inflatable Abominable Snowmonster at the end of a nearby street. He hails from Rankin-Bass's 1964 TV special *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. A nearby house features a front-window mural of Heat Miser and Cold Miser from their 1974 effort *The Year Without a Santa Claus*. Because what is Christmas if not the celebration of childhood — even if the kids who grew up watching those specials are the parents now? (Maybe especially if.) The old answer to that question is Jesus's birthday, the Light behind the lights. And it's true that there are numerous crèches. But who can see them any more? The grand one up the hill features a plywood Bible open to John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world..."), but this year, it includes a political-style yard sign for those who have grown numb to the Good News.

I sympathize. I am sure that some souls have responded to 2020 by clinging tighter to faith and its promises: the pandemic has served as a devastating reminder that this world will not be made into paradise, so it is wise to set your sights on the next one. I am sure that the locked-down months away from public worship made some long for its return as the parched earth longs for rain. But what I experienced was more the withering of a branch cut from the vine, and I suspect I am not alone. Why else would someone paper this page onto a utility box in Little Italy?

"Welsh in those days remained Welshmen wherever they went, whether to the Welsh-speaking colony deep in the interior of Argentina, or to the coal mining towns of Pennsylvania where I grew up. They spoke and sang and prayed in *yr heniaith*, the old tongue. So it was with German and Swedish Lutherans. So it was with French and Italian Catholics. They had cultural *homes*, thousands of miles away from where they were born, and they had them though they had hardly gone

to school at all. But the modern man in his cave, the mass man, has no such home, even if he has graduated college and still lives in the basement of his parents' house."



Trying to refresh the crèche

Whoever it was and whatever their reasons, I'm glad they did it. It struck home in a way that it surely would not have if a friend handed me some theo-philosophical journal and suggested I check out the essay on civilizational decline. (I can barely bring myself to watch movies that other people suggest, even people whose taste I admire.) Glued to that box, shredded and stained, it was a sign in the wilderness from one wanderer to another. ■



Print media, 2020



The Discourse, 2020

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Almost factual news

They Bend Over, We Bow Down

Newly confirmed Catholic Supreme Court Justice authors opinion affirming right of San Diego strip clubs to remain open despite pandemic

"Freedom of religion is freedom of religion, no matter what it is you're worshipping."



Justice Barrett, after the ruling: "Do I want my daughters to strip, or my sons to visit strip clubs? No, of course not. But as I said during my confirmation hearings, my goal as a justice is to defend the law in light of the Constitution, regardless of my personal feelings on the matter. My fellow Catholics have a right to receive Jesus' body in communion during a pandemic, and it's not the government's job to say that those who reverence another sort of body are any less deserving. Look at this photo from Pacers last Saturday night and tell me how it's different from church — the lights, the special clothing, the rapt devotion of the faithful before they make their offerings. Of course, they're all going to hell, but that's not the government's business, either."

There will be no midnight Masses this Christmas Eve in California, thanks to the curfew imposed by the governor's stay-at-home order, imposed in an effort to stop the rapid proliferation of covid-19. And there will be no Christmas Eve 'unwrappings' in the private Champagne Room of Pacers strip club either, for the same reason. But the churches will still have services to mark Jesus' birthday, and the girls will still shimmy down the chimney pole in their Santa's Helper skivvies — again, for the same reason. Because both activities have just been designated as protected from government regulation by no less an authority than the United States Supreme Court, thanks to a 5-4 decision in which new Justice Amy Comey Barrett wrote the majority opinion.

"Over the years, we've been served very well by the claim that stripping is speech, and therefore deserving of special protection," says jubilant Pacers owner Joey Scuzz-

ball. "And that was the line taken by San Diego Superior Court Judge Joel Wohlfeil. But it wasn't enough to keep AG Xavier Becerra — who's probably feeling pretty high and mighty ever since Biden decided to reward him with a cabinet post for his spirited prosecution of that Planned Parenthood sting video guy — from saying he was still gonna come after us for violating California's stay-at-home order. Funnily enough, that's what gave me the idea for switching from a free speech argument to a freedom of religion argument. The same lawyers defending the guy who went after Planned Parenthood are representing some California churches in their effort to stay open. And as we saw last month in *Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn vs. Cuomo*, this new lady Justice is friendly to their way of thinking. Free speech is tricky - you can't shout fire in a crowded theater, so maybe you can't shake your moneymaker in a crowded titty bar. But religious freedom is having

Facade of temple in Khajuraho, India. From the ruling *Pacers vs. Becerra*: "The great ancient historian Herodotus, among others, described the Babylonian practice of sacred prostitution. And who among the sexually experienced can deny that there is something transporting, even transcendent about the sexual act? Not for nothing do the French call orgasm 'La petite mort' - the little death. The very word 'ecstasy' takes its root from the Latin 'ex-stasis' - standing outside. In the moment of climax, we take leave of ourselves, in much the same way as a Catholic mystic or tribal shaman. It is true that the modern strip club does not include such ecstasies - not legally, anyway - but then again, modern Jewish temples no longer offer literal blood sacrifices to atone for sin. In both cases, the spirit of the practice remains. Pacers is, for a certain sort of soul, a kind of church, and is therefore protected in the same manner as the churches in our previous ruling on the matter of pandemic-based shutdowns."



a moment. I knew it was just a matter of getting our case in front of Honorable Mrs. Jesus there in Washington, and I was right!"

The Eagle Re-Branded

BSA retires top badge just in time to welcome first non-boy recipients

Nineteen-year-old Andru Gynous of BSA Troop 1435 out of Poway's Oddfellows Hall is having a special 2020: they have achieved the double honor of being among the first Scouts not identifying as male to receive the organization's top honor, and also among the first to receive it under its new title of Titmouse Scout. "The Eagle Scout badge has long been the Boy Scouts' highest accolade, the culmination of a youth spent acquiring practical skills, cultivating excellent character, and achieving significant goals with strong real-world applications," says Scout helper Will Flopsweat. "But you know, this is a time of welcome change at our organization. Remember, we're not the Boy Scouts any



Gynous proudly points to their new Titmouse Scout patch, along with the Queer Scout and Black Lives Matter patches they earned this summer. "I got them both during a field expedition to Portland," they report. "That was quite a weekend."

more; now that we're not gender-specific, we're the BSA, which stands for...something. Binary Sexuality Anathema? I don't know. Anyway, we've recently entered bankruptcy, thanks to nearly 100,000 allegations of sexual misconduct within our ranks. Eagles, of course, are apex predators, and it was felt that 'preda-

tor' wasn't something we really needed to be associated with at the moment. So we decided to retire the eagle and adopt something more in keeping with our desire that everybody would just stop paying so much attention to us. Or any attention, really. The titmouse seemed a good choice. Can I go now?"

The New War on Drugs?

CDC pleads with San Diegans not to take advantage of incredible deals on covid-19 vaccine - with no waiting!

"Look, everybody knows that Big Pharma is a scam," says Ronald Pillpopper, an Imperial Beach resident who has traveled to Tijuana to get his coronavirus vaccine "without having to go through all the hassle and red tape they've got in the States." He points to the sharp discrepancy between TJ and the US in prices for insulin as an example. "Just crazy. People need that stuff to live, but because of our broken healthcare system, you're paying \$3700 for a three-month supply in the US, and \$600 in Mexico. So I'm supposed to listen to the American medical establishment tell me where



Seems legit.

and when to get vaccinated during a pandemic? I don't think so. Hell, the CDC started out telling everyone not to wear masks. Then they refused to comment on the potential for super spreader events at all the protests. Then you had all

these political people turning public health into some kind of political football, saying they wouldn't trust a Trump vaccine or some shit. I'm done with all of it. The Viagra I get down here works just fine, so I'm betting this will, too."

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ALONE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Christmas Jerk

I managed to avoid being homeless on Christmas Eve 1979, but just barely. Unemployed since that summer, I found a cheap flophouse on 12th and Island where 70 bucks a month got me a room so small that I had to open the door to get out of bed. It was my first holiday in San Diego, 3000 miles from my New England hometown.

Christmas Eve, I got it in my head that I wanted to sneak into a theater to see Steve Martin's new movie, *The Jerk*, which was playing within bicycling range at the Campus Drive-In near SDSU.

I wasn't new to sneaking into drive-ins, either hiding in cars or jumping the fence to meet up with paid customers already parked inside. But for some reason, it never occurred to me

that sneaking into a drive-in without something to drive in might get me noticed.

Stashing my bike in the bushes and getting over the chain-link fence on one side of the lot was easy enough. My plan was to find an unused pole surrounded by cars. Then, I could sit on the ground and use the speaker pole as a backrest and the cars for camouflage. But there were only a handful of cars on the lot, all spaced too far apart.

I found the speaker post that seemed furthest from view of the snack bar and projection booth and sat down to enjoy the movie, which was just starting as I breached the gate (always the ideal cue, as everyone's attention is on the screen). I knew I could easily be spotted, but I was hoping a holiday evening

would find the theater staff as sparsely populated as the parking lot.

I unhooked a paper bag from my belt and took out the peanut butter and jelly sandwich that I hoped would keep my belly filled until the next day's all-you-can-eat holiday buffet at Beasley's Friendly Corner, a deceptively named dive of the damned next to my hotel.

Unfortunately, Steve Martin's character had barely learned shit from Shinola when I saw a kid around the same age as me, in his late teens, deliberately hiking his way across the cement bumps from the snack bar toward me. He looked as unhappy as I felt.

"Do you have a ticket, sir?" I shrugged my shoulders, no use lying.

"I'm sorry, but you'll have to leave."

I was already trying to recall what was playing at the next drive-in, a little further down the Boulevard, as I put my sandwich back in the bag. Maybe their staff was a little less vigilant.

But then the kid kind of looked past me, over my shoulder, even though there was nothing behind me but parking lot and fence. His eyes didn't seem to focus on anything specific, he was just kind of looking. And not saying anything. Like he was thinking about something, maybe remembering something.

I probably muttered "Sorry" as I stood up and dusted gravel off my butt.

"You know what?" the kid said, his eyes focusing on me again. "Enjoy the movie. Merry Christmas!" And with that, he was heading back toward the snack bar before I couldn't do much more than say, "Wow, thanks, you too!"

I'm not sure what made the kid change his mind, and I hope he didn't get

in trouble. It was kind of a *Christmas Carol* moment.

Maybe I just looked particularly pitiful, all alone on Christmas Eve, sitting on the cold cement with my PB&J. But I didn't feel pitiful. I felt great! That's how much I love drive-ins. And what a good time I ended up having that night, enjoying my gift of a free movie. A *great* free movie. This isn't at all a sad memory for me.

Luckily, in the years since then, I haven't had to make a holiday meal of peanut butter and jelly. But I do keep *The Jerk* racked with the Christmas DVDs.

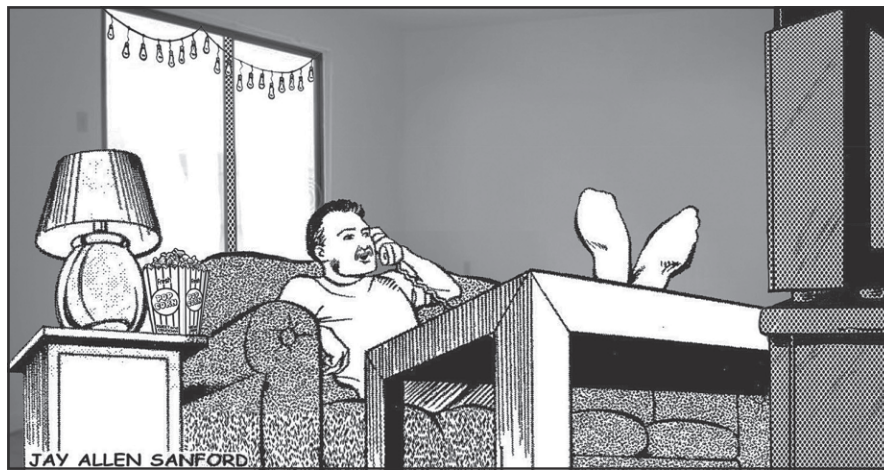
— Jay Allen Sanford

A bachelor's Christmas

When they asked why I hadn't made it home for Christmas, I blamed the military, which wasn't a total fabrication. The Marine Corps had sent my parents to Japan that year. That put a 24-hour travel day between "home for Christmas" and where my 25-year-old self lived: in a shared three-bedroom east of Hollywood.

"You fly west, over the international date line," I regaled my hosts, regarding that flight to Japan. "So your plane takes off Wednesday night, lands Friday morning, and you never set foot on Thursday." The Andersons had all made the trip in the middle of my high school years, and that loophole in the time zone was famous in our household for allowing my mom to technically skip right over her 40th birthday.

I shared the anecdote in a stylish Mission Hills home, as we each raised a glass to Christmas Eve, and to the unblinking understanding this was exactly the one night a year you're kind of the jerk if you don't take in the traveling stranger on your doorstep. This family was genuine and gracious,



made great conversation, and couldn't have been more welcoming.

"Damn it," I thought. I was afraid this would happen.

It was convenient to scapegoat the military for not going home, but it's closer to the truth to say that I found myself alone on Christmas by choice. I couldn't rightly have been called a Grinch at that point, but I was glad to avoid the stress of the holidays. Plus, my college ideals were still fresh, which meant that on the one hand I decried the crass commercialism that corrupted the true spirit of the season, and on the other, I had a week off work and wanted to party.

That other hand is how I wound up in San Diego. My roommates had gone home for the holidays, and I heard a few friends would be gathering down this way. With a futon in the covered bed of my pickup, I ventured south for the weekend without much of a plan. Only, I didn't fully comprehend how much area this county covers. With my pals scattered all across it, I took a couple extra days to get to everyone.

Worst case, I knew I could slip out of town early Christmas Eve, avoiding any awkward invitations to stay and crash a family holiday. But one more friend reached out at the last minute. She was visit-

ing from the East Coast, and finally had time to get together tonight after all. I could pick her up at her parents' Mission Hills house, one of those mid-century jobs that sit flush to the street, with a basement level built into the canyon.

When I arrived, she suggested hanging out in the basement instead. Her sister and a few friends joined us for drinks. Then their parents began sharing nicer bottles of wine than

most twenty-somethings deserve. In the midst of one of those bottles opening, I mentioned I should stop drinking if I hoped to make the drive home to L.A.

But that wouldn't do. They couldn't abandon a holiday orphan to the streets. The wine was poured, the compact agreed to. We would all drink with ardor, and I would fall asleep on the rec room couch with my mouth hanging open. They

were, as I said, lovely people, with generous hearts.

Which occurred to me first thing upon waking, just as morning light began to reach the back corners of the house. Already I could hear giddy steps overhead as the family prepared a Christmas morning. Any moment now, they would come downstairs with jolly songs to rouse me. I could imagine the extra place setting at their breakfast table, and the charitable smiles as they presented me a stocking, hastily stuffed with small, scavenged gifts, so I wouldn't feel left out. And I would stand there, feeling like an interloper: the guy who drank too much but woke up in time for Christmas ham.

When they descended the stairs to call me in for breakfast and togetherness, they found an empty couch and a pile of blankets. I'd crept up the back staircase, out through the garage, and

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was already making record time cruising up an empty freeway. In under two hours, I was experiencing the lone, lazy Christmas celebration I'd envisioned. For the first time in my adult life, I had a house all to myself, and thus an entire, perfect day I could waste on watching old movies, eating junk food, playing music too loud, and napping on a whim. Or, as I would come to call it during most of my bachelor years: Christmas tradition.

— Ian Anderson

A pregnant, homesick Christmas

When I was 19, I found out I was pregnant. I had decided to stay in Lawrence, the sleepy Kansas college town where I lived, rather than go home after the school year ended. I wanted to spend a leisurely summer free of responsibility. Pregnancy was not part of that plan. My dad had been recently diagnosed with cancer. A tumor the size of a golf ball had taken up residency in his brain. I avoided the heavy sadness that blanketed my childhood home by staying away. If I didn't have to see him deteriorate, maybe it wasn't happening.

"I'm going to stay here through the summer," I told my mom nonchalantly over the phone. There was silence on her end. She



was seething.

I met Aaron in June. I was sitting on my porch blaring Janis Joplin and drinking \$2 wine straight from the bottle with my friend Kylie.

"Aaron!" Kylie shouted, waving frantically when she noticed him across the street. He made his way toward us. He had shaggy blond hair, blueish green eyes, and a bloody scab running the length of one leg. He was beautiful.

"Mountain biking accident," he said with a shrug when he noticed me looking at it.

From that moment on, we were inseparable. We dated all summer until my dad's health declined and I was compelled to move back home. It was then that I noticed I was throwing up as much as he was, and I wasn't doing chemo.

I was two months pregnant when I finally broke the news to my parents. They were less than pleased.

It was decided that Aaron would fly out to Chicago and meet my family for Thanksgiving. Christmas we would spend with his before we moved in together.

Aaron flew in two days before Thanksgiving. While running an errand, my dad lost his temper — something he rarely did. The grocery store was flooded with last-minute shoppers. We circled the lot and found only one open spot. A sign in front of it read, "reserved for pregnant women." "That's a definite perk to my condition!" I blurted. The whole car erupted into laughter. Dad turned to Aaron and barked, "There

is nothing funny about a 19-year-old pregnant girl!"

Later that night, Dad pulled me aside and said, "He's not Catholic. That's a real problem!"

I shrugged. He let out a deep sigh.

Before he left, Aaron told my dad he was going to marry me.

"In a Catholic church, I hope," was Dad's response.

For Christmas, I flew to Kansas. It was my turn to meet the family. We stayed at Aaron's mom's and stepdad's house. She bubbled with excitement over the unborn baby. "I can't wait!" she gushed, something I wished my parents would say. She was pretty and blonde. She wore sweater sets and slacks. We stayed in the guest bedroom. It overlooked a golf course. The bed was so tall I needed a step stool to get into it. Everything was some form of vanilla — the walls, the furniture, even their fluffy dog.

A few days before Christmas, Aaron's mom drove us to KC Barbecue. "If you love Aaron, you have to love KC Barbecue," she said. They ordered piles of meat. It was served with a loaf of white bread. Aaron and his brothers devoured everything. I was horrified when his 15-year-old brother turned to me, said, "You don't need napkins when you've got bread," then wiped his hands on a slice before popping it into his mouth.

Christmas Eve, we attended a Presbyterian church service. Aaron sang so loudly that his wildly out-of-tune voice rose above the others. My family did not sing at church. We left that sort of thing to the choir.

Christmas morning when I woke, Aaron was already downstairs. I was still in my pajamas. The rest of the family were

dressed, showered, and had made their beds. They were sitting around the Christmas tree, ready to exchange gifts.

Back home, my family always made a big deal of Christmas. Our stockings were overfilled with loot. We had more presents than we deserved — a ridiculous amount that I always felt guilty about.

Aaron's family was sensible. The stockings at their house were empty, ornamental. They took turns opening gifts, prying tape and paper off neatly, nothing like the savage way my family ripped apart wrapping jobs. Aaron received socks, underwear, and a flannel from Lands End. Aaron's mom bought me earrings, turquoise with a silver feather. She was embarrassed when she noticed that my ears weren't pierced. I was equally embarrassed when she said, "I just figured... most girls' ears are pierced."

Afterward, each scrap of wrapping paper was thrown away. It was nothing like the after Christmas hurricane I was accustomed to. It was peaceful. Zen-like.

At that very moment, my house was probably filled with people. My baby cousin had undoubtedly left a trail of uneaten Christmas cookies in her wake — one behind the curtains, one on my dad's chair, another under the Christmas tree. They'd be talking too loud. Gaelic Park's *Irish Hour* would be blaring in the background, the sound of fiddles filling the house. Eventually, my brother would drag out his guitar. Soon they'd all be singing "South Side Irish." There would be a big mess. It would not be cleaned up until over the weekend.

At Aaron's mom's house, I retired upstairs and sat on the oversized guest bed.

I was desperately homesick. Was this what my life was going to be like now — quiet and sensible?

Aaron came up not long after. "I have a surprise for you!" His eyes gleamed, "We are going on an adventure!"

We drove two hours before Aaron finally turned down a snow-covered road. We parked in front of an old barn.

A man wearing a heavy jacket greeted us. We followed him to a fenced off portion of the yard. Inside were brown and yellow Labrador retriever puppies.

"Pick the one you want," he said

I looked at Aaron quizzically.

"You heard him," he prompted, "whichever one you want"

"To keep?" I was confused.

"You said you pictured us as one of those outdoorsy families with a cute kid and a Labrador. I can't promise a cute kid, but I can promise a cute dog."

I knew in that moment that things were going to be different. Maybe the holidays would not look like what either of us were accustomed to, but we would have our own traditions now. I reached down and picked a roly-poly ball of brown fluff.

"That one?" the man asked. "Are you sure? That one's the runt."

"I'm sure," I nodded. She was so tiny and perfect, the way I imagined our baby would be. And, Baby Andrew was perfect. He was also sort of a runt. Born five weeks early and five pounds even, nearly two months to the day later.

On the drive home to Aaron's mom's house I confessed, "I love you, but I don't think I'll ever love KC barbecue."

"That's okay," he replied. "I don't think I'll ever become a Catholic."

— Siobhan Braun

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Adriana Silveira

A broken leg for Christmas

It was a hot, end-of-vacation Friday. Summertime. Christmas was near. Cicadas zinging. This was New Zealand, where I grew up. I was eight. My brother was at a sea cadet camp. My parents were away at a town 40 miles north. It wasn't a big deal. They were journalists. They were always off somewhere. Just not usually the two of them gone, together. But they said they had this important interview. It didn't bother me. I was just bored.

"Come to the Catholic courts and let me beat you again," said my best friend Richard on the phone.

So I grabbed my racquet, jumped on my bike, and headed off for the Catholic courts, a mile down Muritai Road. I got there before Richard. Started volleying against the volley board. I was a kid who was always late, so the fact that "Herb," as we called him, arrived after me was a delicious moment, which I celebrated by trying to hit him with my shots as he rode between me and the board. He kept riding the gauntlet, faster and faster.

Then I didn't see him for a moment. I looked to my right and here he came, tearing up in the opposite direction. He was trying to zip past, just behind me, to give me a scare. But I saw him and took a couple of steps back, so I could still aim at him.

Shouldn't have done that. He tried to counter my move. We collided. When I started to get up, I couldn't. My right lower leg was folded in two.

"Sure it's okay," said Richard.

Our friend Eric Bowen rode up.

"But it's folded over."

"Probably just twisted," said Richard. "Think you can ride home?"



By now pain was starting to jam in. Especially when I tried to straighten it.

"Eric, give him a dub home on your bike. I'll bring his."

"Should someone call a doctor or something?"

That's me. I can't stop looking at my bent leg. And it's really starting to hurt.

That dub, sitting on the bar of Eric's bike, with my dangling leg juddering every time we hit a bump, was a doozy. "Sorry," he kept saying.

At my place, on Tawa Street, the garage doors were locked. That meant mum and dad weren't back yet. Eric found an apple box, where I could sit outside and lean against the doors with my broken leg dangling free, and wait for my parents. Somebody, Richard, I think — he was there by now with my bike and racquet — got Mrs. Hewitt, about the only neighbor home this time of day, to call for an ambulance. She came out and said the nearest ambulance base was 10 miles away, and they would be an hour or so because they were on another job.

So everybody hung around awkwardly, but in the end, remembered other things they had to do. I just sat on the apple box, feeling the pain start to take over.

"I've gotta go. Tea-time. Mum will kill me," said Herb. "I'm sure it's not broken."

I looked down at my leg.

I could see one fractured end underneath, trying to bust through the skin.

"See ya," I said.

"Me too," said Eric. But he didn't look at me as he picked up his bike.

"Thanks for the dub," I said.

I felt heroic, like Robin Alone, a comic book character who had to survive by hunting and swinging through trees. I thought about all the times I had been up alone in the miles of bush behind our house, slipping and climbing in my own Robin Alone fantasy world. Yet this had happened on a tennis court.

After what felt like hours, the ambulance came and loaded me up. God it hurt. Lorna Hewitt sat beside me. As we swung around the bays, I saw out of the back window my parents, zooming past us, homebound in their white Zephyr droptop. They seemed to be sitting close together. Mom's head was on dad's shoulder.

"It's my parents! Honk your horn!" I yelled, but they were already in the next bay.

"Darling!" said my mom a couple of hours later, after they had reset my leg and wrapped me in plaster from foot to crotch. "Why did you have to pick today of all days? Are we bad parents? Are you punishing us? This is too, too subliminal. Your father and I have so little time together, away from you boys."

Actually, she didn't say that. But that's what it felt like.

— Bill Manson

OB comatose

In the mid-2000s, I was living in a small studio apartment in Ocean Beach. My digs were on the corner of Sunset Cliffs Boulevard and Santa Cruz Avenue — about three blocks from the ocean. Besides the proximity to the beach, I also had easy access to all the bars, restaurants, and shops on Newport Avenue. My humble abode may have been tiny, but life was good.

While the neighborhood could be overwhelming in the summer when all the inland residents and tourists flocked to the beaches, it was sleepy by early December — and by Christmas Eve, quite comatose. The area cleared out in a manner not too far removed from that of a college campus going on break. The many transplants who rented the local apartments and houses fled back to their families. Usually, I did the same.

But sometimes I waited too long to get a plane ticket, and then I stuck around.

Sticking around was



weird. The town was dead. My friends were scattered among other states, and I was spending the most family-oriented week of the year minus both friends and family. It was depressing, but far from an exercise in excruciating pain and misery — except for one year when it was 100 percent excruciating pain and misery.

It began with a plumbing issue. As I recall it, beginning sometime in either November or early December, the water in my unit would not heat up to a temperature above what I will describe as "barely lukewarm." Imagine taking a sip of a cup of coffee that has been sitting on a Starbucks counter for five

hours. Now imagine water of that same temperature coming out of your shower head and soaking your body, which is already cold because you're too cheap to run the heat in December.

So, no surprise, showers during this particular time period became exercises in speed and endurance. Hair still needed to be washed. Filth still needed to be scrubbed from skin. But both had to be accomplished with haste. I became an Olympic-level athlete in the ultra-obscure sport of speed showering. My times improved, but, no surprise, I still got sick.

Getting sick over the holidays was what I dreaded the most. It was a typical flu. Chills. Aches. Sneezes.

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Sniffles. Scattered tissues. Weakness. Lots of weakness. In that state, stepping into that chilly line of fire was akin to meeting the Antichrist. The inner MacGyver in me sprang into action and came up with a solution — the warm bath! I would heat up pots full of water on my stove and pour those into the bathtub. *Genius!* I filled three pots and put them on my electric stove. This warm bath was going to be the best part of an awful week.

And then the circuit breaker tripped. I often look back at this moment as being the definitive low point in a holiday week that is best described as a constant barrage of sorrow. After sulking outside into the drizzle to flip the breaker back, I heated the pots one at a time until I eventually had a bath. It still wasn't hot, of course. The water from the earlier pots had cooled too much by the time the later pots had been poured.

The cause of the lukewarm water remained a mystery for a couple more months. The hot water heater was replaced and that did nothing to remedy the situation. Various plumbers took a stab at the issue and failed. It was only when the landlords called the contractors who had installed a solar-water heating unit on the roof of a neighboring building that the problem was resolved. At some point, a valve had been opened that allowed cold water to flow directly into the hot water that was headed to my unit. As easily as it had been created, the problem was remedied. But too late to save Christmas.

— *Dryw Keltz*

More sad than sexy

On December 25, 1993, I woke up in the empty dorm room of an Amsterdam youth hostel. The



empty dorm room was the antithesis of every Christmas of my life. Every year previously, my brothers woke me up and dragged me downstairs to where my mom played holiday songs on the record player and the air smelled like her coffee cake. First, we opened our stockings, which “Santa” had stuffed full of magazines and chocolate coins and little gifts and Christmas checks from relatives. Then we had a formal breakfast. Afterward, we opened the big presents, exchanged lots of thank yous, and shared lots of laughs. Later, we waded through big piles of torn wrapping paper, feeling a bit of melancholy and disappointment as all the anticipation leading up to Christmas had come to an end. (Maybe that was just me). Then, visits from friends and possibly skiing. Never nothing.

As much as I loved Christmas with my family, in the week leading up to my somewhat impromptu solo trip to Amsterdam and Prague, I had romantic ideas about being alone and anonymous and untethered on Christmas Day. I imagined myself wandering the streets of Amsterdam to a melancholy soundtrack, writing poetry, and maybe falling

in love. Instead, I woke up sad and sought immediately to escape it. Downstairs in the cafe, a man in his 30s or 40s smoked a cigarette. I wanted one, too, but not before coffee. The cafe kitchen was closed. I nodded to the man and went off in search of coffee and distractions.

There was nothing. Coffee, yes, but otherwise, the city was closed for business, and the streets were empty. In the hour I spent outside, the temperature rose from 37 to 38, and then dropped back down to 36. The canals felt anything but romantic as I huddled past them, my gloveless hands trying to hold my sweater closed against the wind. The further I walked, the more my sadness took on an edge of despair. My loneliness was excruciating, and there was no place to hide from it. A warm restaurant, even if I could find one, would not help — other people's joy would make me feel worse.

My cold feet drove me back to the hostel, and I arrived just as a young Italian guy with Jesus hair was coming in from the cold as well. He reminded me of my bad boy high school boyfriend, and I knew I would sleep with him before the day was done. The staff guy behind the counter in the cafe of-

fered us a Christmas beer. We sat together, drinking and smoking cigarettes, and pretending to understand each other in broken Spanish, because I don't speak Italian, and he didn't speak English. After a while, the older guy from the morning joined us. To my 20-year-old self, he was kind of classy and mysterious with his winter scarf and calm demeanor. He was also Italian, and I thought maybe I would sleep with him instead.

When we'd finished our cafe Christmas beers, we braved the cold again and made our way to a bar around the corner. We were three of a handful of people in the bar, but the beer made everything better, more fun, less lonely. We laughed. We smoked. I think we may have eaten something.

And then we slept together. All three of us. We pushed two of the bunk beds together and engaged in an awkward tangle of limbs that was wholly and completely unsatisfying. Even in the moment, I knew it more sad than sexy.

I wish there was more to the story, but there's not. One of the guys left the next day, and I left the day after that. And that was it. I never saw either of them again. A few months later, I received a postcard written in Italian. I had no idea what it said, but when I saw the front, I knew who it was from. It was a photograph of what looked like three pigs humping. I still have it.

— *Elizabeth Salaam*

A caustic monster of self-loathing

I haven't always lived alone. Once, I was happily married, raising a daughter we both adored, and Christmas was quite a wonderful experience.

Then came the breakup, the revolving door of “intolerable cruelty” and “irrec-



oncilable differences,” and I was left to face the world alone. At first, that was overwhelming. I sought solace in illegal chemicals and nurtured a caustic monster of self-loathing.

Ended up back home and wasting a humiliating number of years not even trying to climb out from the abyss. My daughter grew up (she was the only thing that kept me from losing hope), my father died, and I eventually had to make the choice between cleaning up, death by overdose, prison, or a mental institution.

Somehow, I managed to clean up. By then, my mother was starting to slip away from Alzheimer's, and I was lucky enough to help take care of her in her last years.

My mom loved Christmas. Everything about it. From signing cards (we would spend days in that pursuit, since she barely had the energy to sign her name) to singing along to the endless supply of devotional music she had collected over the years. It was her favorite season. On Christmas Eve, all of her family would gather

to celebrate, and she was seldom happier.

And then, on December 11, 2013, she made her transition. There would be no more trees to decorate, no more cards to sign, no more music. Fourteen days later, we gathered at my older sister's house for a decidedly more pen-sive celebration.

After Mom's passing, our extended brood would still gather at my sister's house on Christmas Eve. She had become the magnetic center of my family. A force powerful enough to unite the siblings and the scores of cousins, nieces, and nephews under one roof.

My sister Patricia was 16 years old by the time I came along. She was a straight-A student who overcame many obstacles in her life. It was difficult growing up in her shadow. She was the smartest and most driven person I had ever known, and yet she had the ability to always make me feel that I was the really gifted one. I have a feeling she did the same with everyone.

She had a massive stroke in 2004, and was forced to spend the rest of her days

continued on page 39

Your Week

AND WELCOME TO IT

Thursday | 24

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Quivira Road, Mission
Bay, sdwhalewatch.com

and judged by award-winning plein air artist Eric Rhoads. Artworks are available for viewing and purchase in the online store. Upon purchase, the paintings will be shipped to the buyer unframed.

WHEN: Everyday through Thursday,
December 31.

WHERE: sdws.org

Saturday | 26

WINTER WONDERS & HOLIDAY LIGHTS

Tour a wildlife refuge showcasing



Friday | 25

PLEIN AIR, A VIRTUAL ART EXHIBITION

The San Diego Watercolor Society Gallery in Liberty Station will remain closed until further notice; events have been moved online. But you can still enjoy watermedia art executed *en plein air* (outside) by members

nocturnal animals. A keeper/educator will host your visit, held exclusively for your family. You'll meet our ambassadors while strolling a five-acre facility which has been decorated for the season. The price is \$250 for a family of up to four people. Additional members can be added for a fee.

WHEN:

Saturday and
Sundays. 4:30 pm
and 5 pm. Through
Sunday, January 3.

WHERE: Wild
Wonders, 5712 Via
Montellano, Bonsall.
wildwonders.org



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24: 2.5-HOUR WHALE WATCH

Sunday | 27

SPRECKELS ORGAN CONCERT HOLIDAY SING-ALONG

The Spreckels Organ Society presents San Diego Civic Organist Raúl Prieto Ramírez with guest celebrity vocalist Tasha Koontz, performing a Sunday webcast of holiday music and Christmas classics direct from the Spreckels Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park. Enjoy your holiday favorites,



Monday | 30

THE DANDY WARHOLS: 13 TALES FROM URBAN BOHEMIA

The Dandy Warhols 13 x 20: A 20th Anniversary Concert Celebrating 13 Tales From Urban Bohemia is a full production concert film recorded at Portland, Oregon's Wonderland Ballroom, honoring the band's seminal album, which produced hits such as "Bohemian Like You" and "Godless."

The concert celebrates the 20th anniversary of the release, beginning with a pre-show event showing the band answering fan questions, discussing memories of touring, and making the album. The stream will be available on demand through January 2.

WHEN: Wednesday, December
30, 12 pm

WHERE: dandywarholslive.com



played on the largest outdoor musical instrument in the world.

WHEN: Sunday,
December 27, 2 pm

WHERE:
balboaparkconcerts.org



THE DANDY WARHOLS

HOW TO SEND US YOUR LISTING: Have an event? We want it! Festivals, lectures, sporting events (including surfing, kayaking, and sailing), Meetups, conventions, book signings, art gallery openings, conferences, dance performances, expos, poetry readings, classes & workshops — all are welcome. You can submit an event at sreader.com/events/submit.

ANIMAL FRIENDS

Winter Break Camp for Kids

What does winter mean for animals? Your kids can find out at Winter Critter Camp. Campers will discover why chinchillas don't mind being chilly, how reptiles deal with falling temperatures and how other critters cope with the changes caused by the cold weather. Each day includes hands-on animal encounters, cute crafts, awesome activities and the chance to connect with peers. Thu, Dec 24, 9am; Mon-Wed, Dec 28-30, 9am; \$82. Helen Woodward Animal Center, 6461 El Apajo Road. (RANCHO SANTA FE)

ART

The Art Dr. Seuss Collection Holiday Exhibition Visitors will view holiday-themed and highly collectible works from Dr. Seuss's best-known children's books and explore The Art of

Dr Seuss Merry Grinchmas. The exhibition opens on November 27 with a special reception beginning at noon and extends through December 31. Wednesdays, 10am; through Thursday, December 31, free. Exclusive Collections Gallery Solana Beach, 212 South Cedros Avenue. (SOLANA BEACH)

CHRISTMAS & HOLIDAY EVENTS

Decadent Holiday Takeout Packages

3 Holiday Takeout Packages Each Package serves 2 Adults While we'd love nothing more than to celebrate with you in our cozy restaurant, we realize that this year we will be celebrating a bit differently. Let us bring the outstanding cuisine of Chef Benjamin Navarro into your home. Let us do the cooking. All packages come with reheating instructions. Sorry, no modifications. Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Eve Pick Up Available 11am-2pm Call 619-795-1501 Thursday, December 24, 11am; Friday, December 25, 11am; Parc Bistro Brasserie, 2760 Fifth Avenue. (BANKERS HILL)

Victorian Christmas Tours of the Davis-Horton House Join us for a little Victorian cheer to your holidays! Christmas time has always been a special time at the museum and our staff and volunteers always decorated the

Rhyme & Verse

Excerpt from
"For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio"
A poem for Christmas by W.H. Auden

Well, so that is that. Now we must dismantle the tree,
Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes –
Some have got broken – and carrying them up to the attic.
The holly and the mistletoe must be taken down and burnt,
And the children got ready for school. There are enough
Left-overs to do, warmed-up, for the rest of the week –
Not that we have much appetite, having drunk such a lot,
Stayed up so late, attempted – quite unsuccessfully –
To love all of our relatives, and in general
Grossly overestimated our powers. Once again
As in previous years we have seen the actual Vision and failed
To do more than entertain it as an agreeable
Possibility, once again we have sent Him away,
Begging though to remain His disobedient servant,
The promising child who cannot keep His word for long.
The Christmas Feast is already a fading memory,
And already the mind begins to be vaguely aware
Of an unpleasant whiff of apprehension at the thought
Of Lent and Good Friday which cannot, after all, now
Be very far off. But, for the time being, here we all are,
Back in the moderate Aristotelian city
Of darning and the Eight-Fifteen, where Euclid's geometry
And Newton's mechanics would account for our experience,
And the kitchen table exists because I scrub it.

It seems to have shrunk during the holidays. The streets
Are much narrower than we remembered; we had forgotten
The office was as depressing as this. To those who have seen
The Child, however dimly, however incredulously,
The Time Being is, in a sense, the most trying time of all.
For the innocent children who whispered so excitedly
Outside the locked door where they knew the presents to be
Grew up when it opened. Now, recollecting that moment
We can repress the joy, but the guilt remains conscious;
Remembering the stable where for once in our lives
Everything became a You and nothing was an It.



W.H. Auden (1907-1973) was an English poet who moved to the United States in 1939 and became a naturalized citizen in 1946. He is considered one of the most dynamic poets of the 20th century, writing on an array of subjects, including politics, religion, love, and art. The dynamism of his poetic skill reflected a similar depth; and Auden was critically praised for the mastery of tone and technique in a variety of forms and styles. Auden wrote his long poem, "For the Time Being," between 1941 and 1942; it was published in 1944. The poem presents a series of dramatic monologues offered by the characters of Christ's Nativity with commentary by choruses and a narrator.

Find more poetry online at SDreader.com/poetry

House in style for the holiday season but this year it is truly a sight to behold- virtually! Come along with your guide to explore the period rooms decorated to explore different Victorian Holiday traditions. As a special treat you will get to continue the fun

at home with a Davis-Horton House Victorian Christmas Tour PDF full of history, activities, and other surprises. All Tours are virtual over Zoom and include access to the exclusive Victorian Christmas Tour brochure (PDF) full of fun holiday history and activities! Tour is approximately 30 minutes. After booking the zoom link will be emailed to address that bought the tickets. Questions? Email info@gaslampfoundation.org Wednesday, December 30, 6pm; \$20. Gaslamp Museum at the Davis-Horton House, 410 Island Avenue. (ONLINE)

Winter Wonders & Holiday Lights Wild Wonders invites you to book an exclusive Winter Wonders and Holiday Lights tour of the facility which will showcase nocturnal animals. A keeper/educator will host your visit, which will be exclusively for your family. You'll meet several of our ambassadors while strolling a 5-acre facility which has been decorated for the season. Only offered on selected Saturdays and Sundays in

late December and early January, and there are only two events per night – one at 4:30PM and one at 5:00PM. The price is \$250 for a family of up to four people. Additional members 12+ are \$30, and additional children 5-11 are \$15. Saturday, December 26, 4:30pm and 5pm; Sunday, December 27, 4:30pm and 5pm; \$250-\$350. Wild Wonders, 5712 Via Montellano. (BONSALL)

CLASSES & WORKSHOPS

4-Week Screenwriting Class 4-week class with David Raines designed for anyone who has ever had an idea for a screenplay and wondered what makes a great script into a successful film. Sunday, December 27, 12pm; \$120-\$144. 18 and up. <https://bit.ly/2VgKzqk>. (ONLINE)

Choosing Wellness in the New Year, Part 1 This presentation will outline the five pillars of well-

ness that help optimize health at all times, especially in times of crisis, including ways to reduce stress and optimize health. Watch Choosing Wellness in the New Year anytime after livestream (closed captions in English and Spanish are available) via website. A related video cooking demonstration using simple ingredients to create meals that are delicious and incredibly nutritious at the same time will be released in January 2021. Monday, December 28, 9am; free. sharp.com/health-classes/city-of-san-diego-wellness-workshops-2460. (ONLINE)

Intergenerational Fun with Yiddish In this new class series, Yiddish teacher and native speaker Naomi Miller will teach Yiddish conversational skills through songs, storytelling, word games, and skits. All lessons are interactive and fun. The program will be adjusted to the age of the participants, so don't hesitate to sign up. All children, parents, and grandparents are welcome. Sunday, December 27, 10am; free-\$50. <https://bit.ly/3h5e4oX>. (ONLINE)

Let's Learn the Yiddish Alphabet Together Start with vowels and add on consonants each week. By the end of the first class, the student will be able to read a number of words and phrases in Yiddish. Each week, our knowledge will build upon the previous week's material, to reinforce our learning and build confidence. This class aims to teach literacy – the ability to read Yiddish in Yiddish. There will be some elements of grammar and style, but nothing beyond a beginner level. Along with "doing the work" of literacy, we will also learn through culture, idioms, jokes, curses, and of course, songs. Be prepared for a lot of Simpsons gifs. This is a one-hundred percent no judgment, no attitude, no shaming

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SHEEP and GOATS

Augustus Pugin

The greatest privilege possessed by man is to be allowed, while on earth, to contribute to the glory of God: a man who builds a church draws down a blessing on himself both for this life and that of the world to come, and likewise imparts under God the means of every blessing to his fellow creatures; hence we cannot feel surprised at the vast number of religious buildings erected by our Catholic forefathers in the days of faith, or at their endeavours to render those structures, by their arrangement and decoration, as suitable as their means could accomplish for their holy and important destination. It must have been an edifying sight to have overlooked some ancient city raised when religion formed a leading impulse in the mind of man, and when the honour and worship

of the Author of all good was considered of greater importance than the achievement of the most lucrative commercial speculation. There stood the mother church, the great cathedral, vast in height, rising above all the towers of the parochial churches which surrounded her. . . . The great object I have in directing your attention to such a Catholic city is to illustrate the principle of decorative propriety in ecclesiastical buildings. We have here various edifices of various dimensions, various degrees of richness, various in arrangement, yet each bears on its very face the stamp of Catholic; cathedral or abbey, church or oratory, they all show that they are dedicated to the one true faith, raised by men actuated by one great motive, the truly Catholic principle of dedicating the best they possessed to God.

Augustus Pugin (1812-1852) was an English architect who played an essential role in the Gothic Revival in architecture. Among his most important works is the Palace of Westminster in London and its clock tower, which houses Big Ben. Pugin also designed renowned buildings, including many churches, in Ireland and Australia. In 1834, he converted to Catholicism (his father, a refugee from the French Revolution, became Anglican when he came to England, likely as a way to gain employment, as Catholics were discriminated against at that time), and while his reputation suffered from what many historians held to be unfair attacks by art critic John Ruskin, his ideas were carried forward by the next generation of architects, who had been attracted to the Gothic style which he helped champion.



Find more excerpts online at SDReader.com/worship

classroom environment, and we take a light and easy approach to learning Yiddish. Sunday, December 27, 11am; \$15-\$75. <https://bit.ly/3mzhi5u>. (ONLINE)

Meditation & Mindfulness on the Spiritual Path This class meets regularly on Saturday mornings and consists of seated meditation and a Dharma talk that speaks to integrating ancient Buddhist teachings into our 21st Century lives. Turiya, Spiritual Director of DharmaCenter leads this class. Saturday, December 26, 11am; free. 18 and up. dharmacenter.com/. (ONLINE)

Meditation Practice for All Levels Join Nandi from Dharma Center for seated meditation and discussion. All are welcome; no experience is needed. Monday, December 28, 7pm; free. 18 and up. dharmacenter.com/. (ONLINE)

Meditation: The Truth of Finding Yourself Join Terra from Dharma Center for seated meditation and discussion about the Path. Monday, December 28, 5pm; free. 18 and up. dharmacenter.com/. (ONLINE)

Virtual Winter Youth Workshops Join The San Diego Museum of Art for Virtual Winter Youth Workshops. One-day workshops will include live art

instruction, studio activities, and online tours of the Museum, all from the comfort of home! Designed for elementary, middle, and high school students, the two sessions of Virtual Winter Youth Workshops with The San Diego Museum of Art provide virtual views of the galleries and an opportunity to learn from artist-educators. Wednesday, December 30, 9am; \$24-\$30. sdmart.org/workshops/. (ONLINE)

DISCUSSION GROUPS

Screenwriting Read & Critique Workshop Meet every Sunday to critique a few pages of a screenwriters' scripts, offer feedback, provide encouragement, and get that screenplay from concept to completion. This is not a screenwriting class. It is assumed that you know how to write a screenplay, including structure and formatting, and this workshop is designed to help you put that knowledge into practice. Sundays, 4pm; through Thursday, December 31, \$100-\$125. 18 and up. sandiegowriters.org/sundays-screenplay-read-and-critique-david-raines/. (ONLINE)

FARMERS' MARKETS

Escondido Certified Farmers Market Local, organic and delicious produce from certified farms. Also, a variety of local hot food vendors such as El Veganito, Evelias, Little Someone Japanese cuisine and much more. Tuesdays, 2:30pm; through Monday, December 27, free. Escondido Arts Partnership Escondido Municipal Gallery, 262 East Grand Avenue. (ESCONDIDO)

FILM

Holiday Dinner & a Movie Series Dinner & a Movie is an elevated movie-and-poolside dining experience with tables spaced for social distancing. All month long, catch classic holiday flicks sure to get you in the spirit of the season while enjoying a three-course menu with themed cocktails inspired by the evening's featured film: December 23: National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation, December 30: It's a Wonderful Life. Reservations required. Please arrive by 7:45pm at the latest. Wednesdays 8pm; \$50-\$75. Charles + Dinorah, 1410 Rosecrans Street. (POINT LOMA)

FOOD & DRINK

Christmas Dinner Curbside Pickup Available for Christmas Eve as well as Christmas Day, celebrate in the comfort of your own home with an impressive culinary spread from A.R. Valentien. With options for every palate, the set curbside pickup menu features seasonal favorites that your whole family will love. Perfect for family gatherings of all sizes. Pre-order by December 20. Curbside Pickup December 24 and 25 between 12:00pm - 3:00pm Thursday, December 24, 12pm; \$95-\$100. Lodge at Torrey Pines, 11480 N. Torrey Pines Road. (LA JOLLA)

Christmas Dinner at Home This year, serve a memorable Christmas dinner from George's in the comfort of your own home. Highlights from our three-course pickup menu include Prime Rib with twice-baked potato, Vegetable Pot Pie with squash veloute and fines herbes powder and three varieties of house-made Bûche De Noël. Thursday, December 24, 11am; \$50-\$60. George's at the Cove Ocean Terrace, 1250 Prospect Street. (LA JOLLA)

Holiday Weekend Brunch Special Plated Brunch Menu at

the clubhouse with sweeping views of the Pacific ocean, golf course and Carlsbad hillsides. Bottomless Mimosas, Bloody Mary's and Sangria for \$18. All reservations between 8:00-8:30am will receive a 2-for-1 discount on bottomless mimosas. Saturdays, 8am; Sundays, 8am; through Sunday, December 19, \$11-\$40. Crossings at Carlsbad, 5800 The Crossings Drive. (CARLSBAD)

FOR KIDS

Holidays In Your Car Holidays In Your Car is a unique drive-thru holiday lights spectacular, offering a riveting symphony of sight and sound. *Over one million lights, holograms and projections provide a family friendly and audience-safe holiday experience.* Holograms and impressive multi-colored projections cast festive images of the season onto sets, some standing over 40 feet tall. Thursdays, 4pm; Fridays, 4pm; Saturdays, 4pm; through Saturday, December 26, Del Mar Fairgrounds, 2260 Jimmy Durante Boulevard. (DEL MAR)

Little Explorers Virtual Winter Camp Test out your green thumb with nature-inspired, hands-on art and science activities during

the first week of Virtual Winter Camp. Discover what plants need to grow and survive, adventure out into your community to explore the wonders of nature, and create art masterpieces inspired by planet Earth. Explore Messy Experiments. Experiment with exciting (and safe) chemical reactions to create amazing art masterpieces and fascinating science discoveries. Each day of virtual camp includes: Private access to two daily science and art activities aligned to the camp theme, recorded specifically for campers by our team; Specially curated camp kits with everything you need to complete the camp activities; Two daily Zoom sessions with your camp educator to share information about the topic and facilitate the most fun part of camp: getting to know each other! Zoom calls include songs and games to help keep the camp experience as social as possible. Recommended ages: 4 - 8. Kits will include all the specific materials you need to complete the activities. Parents should be prepared with basic materials such as paper, crayons, glue, and scissors. A full list of preliminary items will be sent prior to the start of camp. Learn more and register: <https://bit.ly/3dJux0C> Monday, December 28, 9am; \$60-\$115. (ONLINE)

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Reader

Delicious dilemmas

“Listen, we have to survive. It’s that simple.”

David hunches over the ocean, elbows on rail, playing his harmonica. He holds long notes. “See? They like it,” he says. “See? See?”

And wow. I’m looking below, and two dolphin fins come knifing through the surface, then they half roll, showing their silver-white bellies, and dive under again.

Next time, it looks different. “That’s a baby seal swimming with a mama dolphin. He’s probably hoping to get some of her leftovers, because she’s hunting. She’s fishing. Maybe anchovy.”

I was drawn to David’s harmonica too. It’s a sun-kissed cool-breeze morning, out here at the end of the Oceanside pier. I spy Ruby’s, a fish and burger joint. A couple of ladies are braving the breeze and actually eating from polystyrene boxes out here. I’m surprised you can do that right now.

I head back to land. All this salt air and exercise! Need a late breakfast, whatever. I pass by two guys sitting on some steps, eating *pollo asado* fries out of polystyrene boxes, from nearby Colima’s Mexican Takeout (at 308 Pier View Way). “Takeout only, man. No place to eat it,” says Shane. “No chairs, no nothing nowhere.” Cost: 12 bucks each. Looks wicked. But sitting on the steps, feet walking by you? I move on.

Five minutes later, I’m on North Coast Highway, and stopping in my tracks: Here’s an actual street-side cafe. Open! Bright yellow. With tables. People eating, drinking bottles of beer, like it’s a normal day. It’s a cafe I kinda remember. Oh yeah. Miss Kim’s Juke Joint. Also called “That Boy Good.” Southern BBQ. And between all these shuttered shops, it’s an unexpected oasis of life. Of course, a little voice nags at me: “What about catching the covid? Or spreading it? Don’t rules about gathering count here?”

But I look at the tables. They’re outside in the breeze. Only one is occupied. Plenty of space. “You’re gonna do it,” my conscience says to me. “Just sit down and live with it.”

“Inside or outside?”

It’s this lively blonde gal with green eyes offset by her black mask and a Booze Brothers Brewing Co. sweat shirt. Olivia. Covid? It’s okay, she says. It seems the powers that be in Oceanside are kinda leaving places to make up their own minds on this.

“Restaurants are hurting so bad, it has become life or death for us,” she says. “For many, it’s worth risking a fine.”

A couple of ladies sit down at a table across the sidewalk. “We come every Tuesday. Every Tuesday. We sip a ‘That Boy Good’ Bloody Mary and get something to eat.”

Today they order a shrimp and sausage gumbo (\$12) and a hickory-smoked, pulled pork sandwich with fries (\$11).

And boy, the Bloody Mary looks something. It’s got vodka, BBQ sauce, dry rub around the rim. Stuffed with pickled veggies, and a rib’s jammed on top. Costs \$12.

I’m looking at BBQ ribs by the bone. And deal! Two bones with cornbread’s only \$5. Sandwiches are between \$11 and \$12, come with a small side. Mesquite-smoked beef brisket in a bun is \$12, hickory-smoked pulled pork’s \$11, country-fried chicken thighs or delta catfish (cornmeal-crust), also go for \$11. A BBQ beef link sandwich is \$11.30.

The main dishes, such as the catfish with fries or cole slaw, are mostly around \$15. You can also go all-out with, say, their BBQ combo platter, which includes beef links, pulled pork, and a half rack of ribs for \$32. For five bucks more, you can add beef brisket. And you get one big side or two small.

A full rack of baby back beef ribs is \$28.

Or you could follow Olivia’s rec. “Today we have our special. It’s happy hour all day, and the pulled pork sandwich is down from \$11 to \$9.50. And that includes a side, and a beer.”

Wow. How about that?

Can’t turn it down. I make my side the collard greens.

But first things first: Olivia brings me out a bottle of Rolling Rock. Then, really quick, comes back with my pulled pork. It oozes out of a shiny golden bun.

And first taste, that hickory smoke hits you, along with the sweetness of the meat, and the BBQ sauce. A couple of large raw onion rings also twang it up. But the best contrast is with the collard greens.

“They shouldn’t be bitter,” says Mark Millwood, the chef. He’s out from the kitchen. “They grow like weeds in Mississippi. But because of their thick stems, they can be tough and bitter. Secret’s



David the Dolphin Whisperer charms dolphins with his harmonica



Gumbo: Veggies, shrimp, rice, slurpability



Pulled pork sandwich: enough meat? Oh yes.

in the liquids. Their liquids are almost the best thing. Don’t throw them away! If they’re done right, collard greens are great with BBQ meat.”

So I start slurping a little of the liquid. Oh yes. Talk about umami. The veggie’s plenty, slightly bitter thing is balanced by these marinated juices.

Huh. I’ve learned something today. Because learning to appreciate collard greens has honestly been a long struggle.

Mark and I natter on for hours. He has had a heck of a life. From Central Valley hardscrabble to Ritz Carlton glory. Think Gordon Ramsey meets Rocky Balboa.

“So you don’t worry about covid, people infecting each other?” I say, finally.



Olivia



Mark: Ritz-Carlton pedigree

“Listen, we have to survive. It’s that simple. Restaurants in Oceanside are balanced on a knife edge. And it’s a free country! We’re grown-ups. Make your own decision. If it’s not safe, stay away. What I think of most is my staff. We are family. They have a right to work. And I have 150 needy kids coming for a ‘hope, love and grub’ deal Christmas Day. No way I’m canceling that.” ■

The Place: Miss Kim’s, 207 North Coast Highway, Oceanside, 760-433-4227

Hours: 11am - 9:00pm daily (closed Christmas Day, Open normal hours, New Years Day)

Prices: Two rib bones with cornbread, \$5; mesquite-smoked beef brisket in bun, \$12; hickory-smoked pulled pork sandwich, \$11; country-fried chicken thighs, \$11; cornmeal-crust catfish, \$11; BBQ beef link sandwich \$11.50; catfish with fries or cole slaw, \$15; BBQ combo platter (beef links, pulled pork, ribs, \$32 (including 1 large or 2 small sides); rack of baby back pork ribs, \$28; Happy Hour pulled pork sandwich, \$9.50, including side and bottled beer

Buses: 101, 302, 303, 313, 318, 392 Flex, 395 Flex, RTA 202, Greyhound

Best Bus Stop: Oceanside Transit Center

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Nearest Station: Oceanside Transit Center, 235 S. Tremont Street, Oceanside

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Bite the bark

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Cali Comfort BBQ: slow and low, safe and easy

Cali Comfort BBQ; 8910 Troy Street, Spring Valley. If your pandemic bingo card has restaurants re-opening in response to a judge declaring strip clubs can not be shut down by the state's stay at home

order, well congratulations! — you might win 2020. At this writing, enforcement of dining restrictions has been halted as the county tries to make sense of the ruling, meaning the small number of restaurants that already defied the shutdown are off the hook, and a larger number of restaurants have now joined them in resuming on-premise, outdoor dining service.

FEAST!



Smoked brisket, with a satisfying black bark.

But while our entire metropolitan sprawl seems to be living out some dystopian Phillip K. Dick sci-fi, count me among those greeting the apparent public safety loophole with a shrug. I know very well that restaurants doing take-out only risk going out of business, and I want to support them. But I know our region's ICU capacity is threatened.

I will be picking up meals from spots like Spring Valley's Cali Comfort BBQ. The East County mainstay started this year eyeing an eventual expansion into Barrio Logan, but instead has diverted its attention to transitioning to an all take-out and delivery model.



A BBQ take out order, including smoked chicken, brisket, pork ribs, mac and cheese, coleslaw, macaroni salad, and jalapeño corn muffins.

As a result, Cali Comfort operates like a case study in how to operate a restaurant during these tough times. The home page of its website offers well defined buttons to order take out, order delivery, order catering service, and to purchase gift cards — the latter day currency of foodies. It features a link clearly laying out its option for family meals, which bundle enough food for four or five people into a single, discounted order.

In this case, \$75 conjures everything you could want in a BBQ feast: brisket, tri-tip, rib tips, pulled pork, smoked chicken, a handful of side dishes, and the restaurant's celebrated

pork ribs. It's terrific BBQ done right, slow and low, on a wood fired smoker fired up when it's still dark out. A sweet but not too sweet Kansas City-style BBQ sauce is applied to the chicken and pork, while the brisket has a trimmed ledge of rendered fat and that satisfying black bark charred from a well-seasoned rub.

Beyond the family meal, there are other ordering options. Any individual meat is available by the pound for \$11-30, as a sandwich for \$12-16, or as a combo plate with side dishes for \$14-30.

When ordering and pre-paying online, Cali Comfort's ordering system makes it clear how

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24 San Diego Reader December 24, 2020



A half order tub of beef birria.



The *madrazo* – like a flour tortilla quesadilla with beef birria inside

many drink options the place offers. In addition to sodas, there are bottles of wine (\$10), growlers of beer (\$10-12), and growlers filled with cocktails ranging from bloody mary to mai tai (\$20-38).

Pick-up is likewise smooth. A well-structured payment and pick-up window is set up at the rear of the restaurant, found in the back of a small parking lot. If you've pre-paid online, you may skip the first window, and grab your packed up food at the second.

This place is doing everything right, and my food was still warm and succulent as can be after my 15-minute drive from Spring Valley. Even the kids raved about it.

by Ian Anderson

From National City to 664 TJ Birrieria

664 TJ Birrieria; 505 Highland Avenue, National City. Tender shredded beef birria, swimming in reddish brown broth that leaves an orange ring 'round the edges of the Styrofoam cup containing it. That's the Tijuana-style specialty of National City's 664 TJ Birrieria.

But it's not just National City's anymore. Over the past three years, the small South Bay birria shop has multiplied, expanding to locations in Barrio Logan, Chula Vista, Palm City, Logan Heights, City Heights, and all the way out on the Las Vegas Strip.

It can be fun to imagine midwestern tourists who cruise the Strip trying to pronounce *birrieria*. Such customers may not immediately recognize that TJ means Tijuana, nor that 664 refers to the Tijuana area code. But maybe, if they get as far as pronouncing it "beery area," they'll make the association with San Diego.

Not that I can say it much better. I valiantly try but fail to trill those Rs as I place my half order of the shredded beef stew (\$7.50; large goes for \$11). But however you pronounce birria, there's little question it lands warm in your belly, making it an ideal take-out order in cool weather.

I paid a lunchtime visit to the Barrio Logan location (1794 Newton Avenue, Barrio Logan), and found I wasn't alone in thinking so. Health care and manufacturing workers in the immediate vicinity

do offer the aforementioned tacos (\$2.25), quesadilla (\$2.80, with corn tortillas), along with stacks of corn tortillas



with a distinctive orange hue, having been dipped in the beef consommé.

It's easy enough to take it all home and use the included fixin's (diced onion, cilantro, and radishes) to roll the beef shreds into tacos. One of the best parts of 664 TJ is the excellent, slightly roasty red salsa. Though I add this generously to any taco, quesadilla, or tostada, I still want to dip everything back into that thick reddish broth. I'm bound to make a sloppy, savory mess, but it's always going to taste better that way.

That's why I recommend ordering a Styrofoam cup of birria, or at least consommé, even though the 664 TJ shops

added, \$3.50) and *madrazos* (\$4.50), which are flour tortilla quesadillas with some of the shredded birria beef pressed within.

Though these are terrific, and though I will gladly pay extra to

add cheese to most cheese-optional dishes in this world, birria doesn't really need it. And while 664 TJ's birria isn't the most flavorful in town (I see you, Tuetano Taqueria), when you add that 664 salsa, it's tough to go wrong.

by Ian Anderson



They serve quesabirria tacos (with melted cheese

A regular birria taco (left) and a quesabirria taco (right, with cheese).



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ALLIED GARDENS

McGregor's Grill and Ale House: *Monday, Thursday-Friday, 4-6pm:* \$1 off all pints, wells, house wines, \$5 off half gallon pitchers. *Tuesday, 4-6pm:* \$1 off all pints, wells, house wines, \$5 off half gallon pitchers, \$5 Pacifico pints and Margaritas. *Wednesday, 4-6pm:* \$1 off all pints, wells, house wines, \$5 off half gallon pitchers, \$5 whiskey cocktails and shots, half price bottles of wine.

CORONADO

Brigantine Coronado: *Daily, 3-6pm:* \$1 off all draft beer, well drinks, and featured wine by the glass, \$4 sparkling wine glass. **Nicky Rottens:** *Monday, 3-6pm:* \$8 select mules all night. *Tuesday, 3-6pm:* \$4 any canned beer. *Wednesday, 3-6pm:* \$5 draft pints. *Thursday, 3-6pm:* 22 ounce draft for pint price. *Friday, 3-6pm:* \$6 mimosas and Bloody Marys. *Saturday, 3pm-6pm:* \$5 drafts, well cocktails, house wines. \$5 pretzels & beer cheese, side of fries, tots, \$6 buffalo wings, \$7 house nachos, \$8 chicken fritters & fries, \$10 chicken lettuce cup.

DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO

Gaslamp Fish House: *Daily, 3:30-6:00pm:* \$4 Fireball shot, McCormick bourbon, shot of Torado Silver tequila, \$5 craft beer on tap, vodka soda, select wine by the glass, \$7 skinny margarita, select signature cocktails.

Gaslamp Tavern: *Monday-Friday, 3-7pm:* \$2 off drafts, wine, specialty cocktails, \$5 wells.

Knotty Barrel: *Monday, Friday, 4-7pm:* \$2 off craft beer, \$6 premium wells, house red and white wines. *Tuesday, 4-7pm:* \$2 off craft beer, \$6 premium wells, house red and white wines. Half off craft beer all day. *Wednesday, 4-7pm:* \$2 off craft beer, \$6 premium wells, house red and white wines, half off wine bottles all day.

Maryjane's: *Monday-Friday, 3-6pm:* \$5 wells drinks, beer, \$6 wine.

Rockin' Baja Lobster — Gaslamp: *Monday-Friday, 3-6pm:* \$4.50 any 14-oz. draft, well drinks, fireball shot; \$5.50 Jameson shot, house margaritas; \$6.50 wine by the glass, Jack Daniels, Grey Goose.

The Tippy Crow: *Monday-Thursday, 3-8pm:* Drink exchange (prices vary). *Friday-Saturday, Noon-8pm:* Drink exchange (prices vary).

Werewolf American Pub: *Tuesday-Friday, 3-6pm:* \$4 drafts, house wines, and wells.

Whiskey Girl: *Monday, 7-9pm:*

BOOZE NEWS

BY IAN ANDERSON

A boozy review of 2020

It will surprise no one that most of the biggest beer and beverage stories of 2020 revolve around the covid-19 pandemic. Public response to the coronavirus wreaked havoc on the everyday business of serving beer.

Workers bear the brunt

The beer industry came into the year credited with making a billion dollar-plus economic impact annually, while directly employing about 6500.

The loss of beer-related jobs has been the most widespread impact of the pandemic, as shutdowns and heavily restrictive social distancing guidelines forced many breweries to cut employee hours, furlough staff, or lay them off altogether. Exact numbers may never be tallied, but anecdotally, some workers have been rehired or repurposed, some have managed to pick up work at other breweries, and others have relied upon some combination of piecemeal wages and unemployment benefits to get by — if they're lucky. With on premise service hampered, tipped employees have been

particularly out of luck. It remains to be seen whether such jobs will return once vaccinations become prevalent.

Ownership struggles and opportunities

When the pandemic shut down San Diego bars in March, things looked dire for the beverage industry. But federal grants and loans helped many through the worst, and as time has passed, the industry has more closely echoed the nation's K-shaped recovery: meaning some individual businesses thrive, even as others face decline.

Though several beer companies have shuttered in response to the pandemic, the number of outright closures is actually down compared to prior years. Two of San Diego's smallest nanobreweries — **Escondido Brewing** and **Thunderhawk Alements** — were among the first to go, followed by Vista's **Iron Fist Brewing**. Perhaps the most significant closure was **San Marcos Brewery**, which had been brewing beer since 1991.

Rather than close, several breweries have instead been put up for sale. **32 North Brewing** sold to a pair of new interests, and **Circle 9 Brewing** was put on the market. Add to this list America's very small brewery champion of 2015, **Rip Current Brewing**. Co-founder Paul Sangster says the brand has attracted a "significant amount of interest," and will likely see a change or modification in ownership by new year.

More often, breweries closed individual locations: **Two Roots**, **Belching Beaver**, and **Culture Brewing** closed Ocean beach taprooms, for example. **Amplified Aleworks** and **Legacy Brewing** cleared out of Miramar, and **Automatic Brewing** closed its **Tiger Tiger** bar. To the chagrin of few beer fans, **10 Barrel Brewing Co.** ended its tenure in East Village. Several of these locations have been claimed by other beer businesses, still looking to expand heading into 2021.

New ways to sell beer

Arguably the biggest change that helped breweries survive 2020 was the relief offered by California's Alcoholic Beverage Control, which allowed them



Rip Current Brewing adopted screwtop crowlers in 2020, and (unrelated) may have new ownership in 2021

to add home delivery and shipping to their takeout options. This mainly helped breweries that had invested in canning lines and crowler machines (some offering newly available, screwtop crowlers). By the end of the year, roughly 45 were offering in-house delivery service, several in North County were delivering through new site BrewCatalog.com, and several others offered beer to-go through third party delivery services such as GrubHub and DoorDash.

Fundraising and social advocacy

Despite the challenges for those working in adult beverages, a great many people in the industry responded to adversity with charitable actions. Brewpubs and bars established programs to donate meals to first responders and those out of work due to various shutdowns and restrictions. Places like **AleSmith**, **Stone Brewing**, **Bay City Brewing**, **619**

Distillery, and craft beer mainstay **Small Bar**, which continued to provide meals even as it closed permanently in November.

Dozens of local breweries participated in Black is Beautiful brews, a nationwide collaboration raising funds for local organizations espousing the social justice principles of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Beer Media take a hit

It was a year of tumult and change, not only within the beer industry, but also for the media covering it. For starters, the most venerable voice in San Diego beer, Peter Rowe, retired from the **Union-Tribune** after covering San Diego breweries for a quarter century.

Meanwhile, the disappearance of restaurant and bar ad revenue has seen several publications shut down or suspended. San Diego **CityBeat** stopped publishing altogether, and while **San Diego Magazine** returned from a spring hiatus, so far, it has resumed without a dedicated beer column. Likewise, monthly beer and beverage magazine **West Coaster** remains on indefinite hiatus, having published one issue since the spring. Without their mastheads, regular contributors for these magazines have pursued self-publishing. Former **Reader** columnist Brandon Hernandez launched his own website, **SanDiegoBeer.news**; and Beth Demmon, former columnist for **CityBeat**, **San Diego Magazine**, and **West Coaster**, plans to launch a substack in the new year, which she will dedicate to "highlighting marginalized voices in craft beer."

For more craft booze news, see sandiegoreader.com/news/booze-news

LA MESA

Brigantine La Mesa: *Daily, 3:30-6:30pm:* \$1 off well drinks, drafts, featured wines, \$4 glass sparkling wine, \$5.75 margaritas, \$6 happy hour red wine, happy hour white wine.

Hooleys Irish Pub & Grill La Mesa: *Friday, All day:* Clam chowder \$5 cup, \$7 bowl. After 4pm: Prime rib \$24. *Sunday, 11am-2pm:* \$4 Bloody Marys, \$5 Champagne.

LAKESIDE

Eastbound Bar & Grill: *Tuesday-Friday, 2-5pm:* \$2 off all house cocktails, \$3 domestic bottles, \$4 micro drafts.

LEMON GROVE

Dirk's Niteclub: *Daily, 4pm-7pm:* \$3 shot of select liquor with your first drink. *4-7pm:* \$1 off domestic beer, 50 cents off cocktails.

LITTLE ITALY

King and Queen Cantina: *Daily, Noon-6pm:* \$1 off drafts, \$4 beer bottles, \$7 well drinks, wine, sangria, \$8 margaritas. Appetizers \$5 to \$9.

MISSION BEACH

Coaster Saloon: *Monday, 3pm-6pm:* \$3 Jager shot with any beer purchase, \$4 select Bud draft, \$5 well drinks. *Tuesday, 3pm-6pm:* \$3 Jager shot with any beer purchase, \$4 select Bud

draft and El Jimador shots, \$5 well drinks, house margarita. *Wednesday, 3pm-6pm:* \$1 off all IPA, \$3 Jager shot with any beer purchase, \$4 select Bud draft and Fireball shots, \$5 well drinks.

Thursday, 3pm-6pm: \$3 Jager shot with any beer purchase, \$4 select Bud draft, Mission Blonde draft, Polish Pie shots, \$5 well drinks. *Friday, 3pm-6pm:* \$3 Jager shot with any beer purchase, \$4 select Bud draft, \$5 well drinks, Captain Morgan, Jack Daniels, Jager shots. *Saturday, All day:* \$15 Champagne bottles. *Sunday, All day:* \$3 Jager shot with any beer purchase, \$12 Champagne bottles.

MISSION HILLS

Shakespeare Pub & Grille: *Monday-Friday, 3-7pm:* All draught pints (excluding cask, \$6 Anytime, and Black Velvet) and bottled beer \$1 off. well liquor \$4.50, \$5 house wine, appetizers \$5.95-\$7.95.

MISSION VALLEY

Lazy Dog: *Monday-Thursday, 3-6pm and 9pm-close:* \$3-\$8: Housemade sangrias, well drinks, drafts, house wine, Asian pear martini. *Friday, 3-6pm:* \$3-\$8: Housemade sangrias, well drinks, drafts, house wine, Asian pear martini. *Sunday, 9pm-close:* \$3-\$8: Housemade sangrias, well drinks, drafts, house wine, Asian pear martini.

North Italia Fashion Valley: *Monday-Friday, 3-6pm:* \$5 glasses red wine, white wine, sangria, beers, \$16 wine bottles and beer pitchers.

NORTH PARK

Redwing Bar & Grill: *Wednesday-Friday, 3pm-6pm:* \$4.50 24 oz. Tall Boys.

OCEANSIDE

Rockin' Baja Lobster — Oceanside: *Monday-Friday, 3-6pm:* \$4.50 any 14-oz. draft, well drinks, fireball shot, \$5.50 Jameson shot, house margaritas, \$6.50 wine by the glass, Jack Daniels, Grey Goose.

OLD TOWN

Home & Away: *Monday, Wednesday-Friday, 3-6pm:* \$1 off glass of wine, draft and bottled beer, well drinks, \$3 to \$6 off specialty cocktails. \$2.75 tacos. *Tuesday, 3-6pm:* Taco Tuesday specials, see server.

Old Town Mexican Café: *Tuesday,* Half off well drinks and selected appetizers all day.

Rockin' Baja Lobster — Old Town: *Monday-Friday, 3-6pm:* \$4.50 any 14-oz. draft, well drinks, fireball shot, \$5.50 Jameson shot, house margaritas, \$6.50 wine by the glass, Jack Daniels, Grey Goose.

PACIFIC BEACH

Ambrogio 15: *Monday-Friday, 3-5pm:* \$19 per person biodynamic (organic) wine flight with three selected biodynamic wines (two ounce pour) and focaccia bread, olives, artichokes.

Mavericks Beach Club:

Monday, 5-6pm: \$4 beer, wine, and wells, \$6 margaritas and mai tais. \$2 off snacks. *3-10pm:* Half off one pound orders of all wings, no limit. *Tuesday, 5-6pm:* \$4 beer, wine, and wells, \$6 margaritas and mai tais. \$2 off snacks. *5-10pm:* \$10 all you can eat taco bar. *5pm-2am:* \$4 all Mexican beers, \$4 Margaritas, \$4 shots of Eljimmyador. *Wednesday, Friday, 5-6pm:* \$4 beer, wine, and wells, \$6 margaritas and mai tais. \$2 off snacks. *9pm-2am:* \$3 Natural Lite seltzers and Naturdays, \$4 shots of Jameson, Altos, Absolut, Malibu, Jagermeister.

POINT LOMA

The Pearl: *Monday-Tuesday, 4-6pm:* \$4 select beers, \$5 well drinks, \$6 house wine, half off specialty cocktails. *Wednesday, 4-6pm:* \$4 beer, \$4 select beers, \$5 well drinks, \$6 house wine, half off specialty drinks. *Thursday-Saturday, 4-6pm:* \$4 select beers, \$5 well drinks, \$6 house wine, half off specialty drinks.

RANCHO SAN DIEGO

Hooleys Irish Pub & Grill Rancho San Diego: *Friday, All day:* Clam chowder \$5 cup, \$7 bowl. After 4pm: Prime rib \$24.

SAN MARCOS

Churchill's Pub and Grill: *Monday-Friday, 4-7pm:* \$1 off appetizers, drafts, wells. *Sunday, All day:* \$1 off appetizers, drafts, wells.

The New York Times
CRITIC'S PICK



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blurt the inside track

Now is the time Since March, the only students and personnel permitted on the campus of Palomar College have been those connected to the nursing program. The enforcement is so strict that it took Rob “DJ Roob” Blackwell a month to retrieve

I’ll go back and re-record it. It just doesn’t sound as fresh sometimes but, nevertheless, it’s still working and I’m getting it out there.”

A staple of Not So Serious Radio are the live, in-studio performances by various local bands. To retain this signa-

from a virus standpoint in the County — so we tapered them. We’ve only done two since then. My last one was a couple weeks ago, and I’m not going to do any more for the foreseeable future, because I want to see what happens with this surge.”

And speaking of surges, this pandemic hasn’t been easy on Roob. He suffers from anxiety which is a result of major depression disorder. “My depression manifests as anxiety and it has been off the charts since March,” he

explained. A greater wealth of information about the virus has calmed his nerves considerably, as has working on his radio show and the act of simply listening to music. In an effort to help others dealing with mental illness, Roob dedicated an entire NSSR show to the subject in early June.

“I put the call out there, and I got eight San Diego artists to participate,” he explained. “I included all their audio bumpers at the introduction to the song and then

played the song. I got such really nice feedback. A lot of private messages that were just like ‘Thanks for doing this. I felt so alone and now I don’t, because I know this band and I didn’t know this guy had social anxiety.’ Even if one person had responded to me, I would have been like ‘that’s pretty good,’ but I had a bunch of people write in. It was rewarding.”

In a further act of good will, in October Roob threw together a Not So Serious Radio t-shirt fundraiser that raised \$2300 for the National Independent Venue Association Emergency Relief Fund — which was established to get money to local clubs such as The Casbah, the Brick By Brick, and (before it recently shuttered) Bar Pink.

“[Bar Pink] was the place where I saw my last live show before the shutdown,” Roob explained. “It’s heartbreak-

ing. Especially a place where you’ve been, and you had a good time and you’ve gone back a bunch of times. You just think it’s gonna be there forever.”

He continued, “I think that we are going to lose some local venues, and we’re not alone here in San Diego. But something will come back and help fill the spaces, because there will be opportunities for people who say, ‘You know what, I’ve never owned a venue. I really want to do this. Now is the time.’”

— Dryw Keltz

Remote and difficult “I broke my hip bone while rock climbing in Zion National Park in Utah,” reports singer-songwriter Daniel Isle Sky. “I was rescued by a [National Park Service] helicopter the next day. A surgeon in St. George screwed my bones back together.” Sky had been staying in nearby Springdale to work on a motivational book (*Because You Can*) and develop non-music gigs as a motivational speaker. Doing so near his favorite mountain range seemed only natural.

“Like music, rock climbing has been a passion of mine. It’s more of an escape from reality than conquering mountains. Just like all the songs in the universe haven’t been written, all of the mountains in the world haven’t been climbed. Through my explorations, I’ve been able to do the first ascents of ten mountains officially named on maps of Zion National Park, my favorite place to climb.”

The pandemic closed down the Park, as well as making work difficult to find. “I was lucky enough to regularly perform outside of Deep Creek Coffee. The shop was open for outside service only. I had found a space that allowed me to perform, unplugged, at a safe social distance.”

When Zion finally opened to climbing once again, “I had the idea to do a traverse of what are called beehives, a series of white sandstone peaks that look like beehives. To get to any of them was difficult. To climb them all

in a row had never been done. In addition to difficult climbing, there are canyons between each that had to be descended. Full adventure. The owners of the coffee shop hooked me up with a local who was working there as a guide.”

It took the duo three days to complete the climb. “It was on the way down, less than 400 feet from the ground, when the incident occurred. We were rappelling an 800-foot cliff. On the way, we had found a fallen balloon, the type kids get at parties. It had a picture of a unicorn on it. My song ‘Lucky the Unicorn’ came to mind. I told my partner we were lucky. I always pick up trash, and stuffed it into my pack.”

The climbers were hanging from a bush on the side of a mountain. “I took the 600 feet of rope we had, wrapped it around the bush, and threw both ends down. That would allow us to go 300 feet, perhaps get us to the ground. The rock face below us was blank. To the side was a ramp with more bushes. So I started following the bushes. After about 15 feet of going diagonally, I straightened out. I went down about 100 feet and heard a snap. The

hip bone, Sky made it to the ground with the help of his partner. “But we couldn’t move me away from the cliff, the terrain was too rugged. The search-and-rescue and law enforcement cleared the parking lot and road at a nearby hotel, the Zion Lodge, to stage the rescue. The helicopter first made a few reconns to see if it was possible. A foot team arrived to help me — an EMT, and someone on the ground to aid the helicopter. They asked me if I had sunglasses. It was to protect my eyes from blowing dust and rocks. I got short-hauled on a cable attached to the bottom of the helicopter to the hotel site. I didn’t have health insurance, so I waived taking an ambulance. My partner drove me to the hospital in St. George.”

Sky, who moved here from Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2014, is back in San Diego and on the mend. “Since I’m not able to work or climb, I’m spending more time on my music.” His new single “Lean on Me” was recorded at Pacific Beat Recording in PB with Rolling Stones producer Alan Sanderson.

“I joke that if I get a good number of streams and follows on Spotify or whatever stream-



PHOTOGRAPH BY KURT SONDERGGER

Rob “DJ Roob” Blackwell records John and Jozette Vineyard playing in the courtyard of his house.

his Not So Serious Radio program banner out of their KKSM campus radio station’s offices.

But even though there is no life to be found in the KKSM headquarters, the station is still alive. A library of music is auto-playing over their airwaves, and a couple of actual human DJ’s are recording remotely from their homes. After a short break, even DJ Roob got back in the game.

“I took a few weeks off and floundered for a bit,” he explained. “Then I talked to the station manager and he said that if I record a show at home he could upload it and it would play at my time. So, I started doing it in late April. I kept it to an hour. It’s not as fun as being live on radio by any stretch. It’s stilted. When you’re on the radio if you make a mistake you go on, but here if I’m recording,

ture element of the program, Roob figured out a way to incorporate the performances into the pandemic-era installments. He would not be able to host full, electric, live bands, but the courtyard of his North County home would serve just fine for recording scaled down acoustic sets. The guinea pigs were John and Jozette Vineyard, a husband and wife duo who make up half of The Oxen. The show was a success, and ten more artists appeared before the performances were put on ice.

“I wanted to make sure that we were sending a good message and that we were being safe, because I didn’t want to be the DJ that had the super-spreader events at his house,” Roob said. “It worked really well, and we did a whole bunch in a row. Then things started getting a little dicey over the summer



Local musician Daniel Isle Sky shattered a hip during a climbing accident in Zion National Park, Utah.

rope had been going over a bush on the ramp, keeping it straight. When it broke, I started to swing like a pendulum. I swung around the corner and slammed into the side of another corner, a flat outcropping. There was no way I could swing around it. I hit the corner flat and square on my hip and came to a complete and sudden stop.”

Despite suffering a broken

ing service people use this coming year, I’ll stick to music. If, on the other hand, I’m not inspired by what comes, perhaps I’ll go back and do another climb. The ones on my list are remote and difficult.”

— Jay Allen Sanford

Find Blurt online at SDReader.com/blurt

CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Bush, Mike Madriaga, Andrew Hamlin, Dryw Keltz, Jay Allen Sanford



L.A. EDWARDS

Local company Bitchin' Sauce started selling its wares at local farmers markets before expanding operations to become a national sauce brand. The firm recently launched its own music label, with distribution arranged through Universal Music Group. Bitchin' Music Group says it's focused on developing established and up-and-coming artists across the Americana, country, and rock genres. They released their first record this month, *Blessings From Home* by L.A. Edwards, comprised of brothers Luke (vocals, guitar), Harry (drums), Jay (keys), and Alex Edwards (lead guitar). According to their Bitchin' press release, "The

band imparts graceful Laurel Canyon songcraft on groove-driven rock with sun-soaked twang." The confessional and personal nature of the tracks are evident in song titles such as "My Heart Broke," "Nothin' Like You," and "What You Mean To Me." Recording was done at Bear Creek Studio in Washington with producer Ryan Hadlock (Lumineers, Vance Joy, Foo Fighters), drummer Steve Ferrone (drums) of Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers, and bassist Ron Blair. Luke and Blair, both from San Diego, have been collaborating since the first L.A. Edwards album, *True Blue*, which Blair produced in 2017.



HARGO

The new track from Hargo, "Breathe," is inspired by the teachings of Gurucharan Singh Khalsa. "Late this summer," he says, "I reconnected with a longtime friend of mine who is a well-known Breath Work & Kundalini Yoga pioneer who taught yoga and mindfulness at M.I.T. in Boston for years. Through an unusual series of events, we started talking again, and this idea came up for me to create piece of music to accompany a new breath series he was creating around the Breath of Fire - rapid inhale and exhale through the nose while pumping the navel - which is staple Pranayama [breathing practice] of

many kinds of yoga, including Kundalini Yoga, the stuff I grew up doing since childhood." Although he says it was an odd request, "I found myself with the time and space to devote to something new. So I said yes, started playing around with some loops, and several days later this track 'Breathe' emerged. It's a deep dive into the cosmos, within and without, and a great way to connect to your breath...I particularly loved getting to use Bhol's speaking/chanting the tabla percussion rhythm 'Dha ge tirkit Dha Dha' in the track. Takes me right back to my roots studying classical Indian music at boarding school in India."



MATT CAMERON

Matt Cameron grew up in San Diego, appearing on the soundtrack of the 1978 cult movie *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* by singing the track "Puberty Love" (a song which makes the titular tomatoes explode). After graduating Bonita Vista High School, he played with the group Fault Line with Glenn Slater, who later moved to Seattle, Washington, and invited Cameron up to visit. After moving to Seattle himself in 1983, Cameron played with Feedback and Skin Yard, before replacing Soundgarden drummer Scott Sundquist in 1986. After Soundgarden split in 1997, he joined Pearl Jam, replacing Jack Irons. Cameron recently launched a new project called

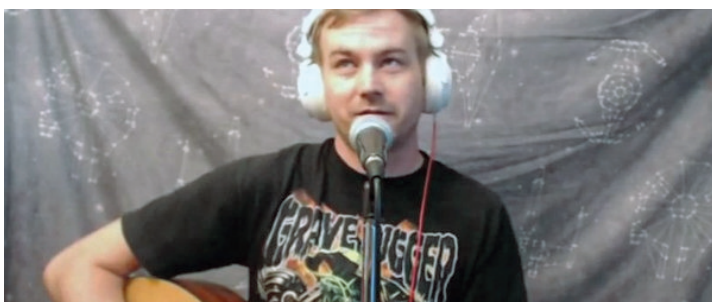
Nighttime Boogie Association with Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins. The first two songs they wrote, recorded, and produced are now available via their own Keep It Trippy Records label. "Long in the Tooth" was written by Hawkins (lyrics) and Cameron (music) and features Cameron on guitar, bass, and drum machine and Hawkins on lead vocal, drum fills, percussion, and keyboards. Cameron wrote the music and lyrics for "The Path We're On" and also plays drums, guitar, and vocals. Hawkins performs the drum intro, as well as lead vocals and keyboards. The latter song also features Melvins members Buzz Osborne on guitar and Steven McDonald on bass.



SHANE HALL

Blues, soul, and Americana artist Shane Hall (The Klay) spent several years fronting Shane Hall & the Diabolicals before going solo. Among the influences he cites are Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughn, Eric Clapton, John Mayall, and Alice in Chains. A 2018 single "Tomorrow" was promoted with a video treatment co-created by Oceanside's Cinematic Art and Sound, and he also appeared at that year's Kaabo Festival. His song "Under My Voodoo" is among more than 30 never-before-released acoustic covers that have been added to the compilation album *The House That Brad-*

ley Built. The Deluxe Edition of the record includes over 50 covers from the catalog of Bradley Nowell's band Sublime, available January 15 on all streaming platforms and as a three-disc CD set. Profits from the album will go to the Nowell Family Foundation to help build Bradley's House, an opioid abuse treatment facility in Southern California named in honor of late Sublime frontman. Other locals on the compilation include Pepper, 40 Oz. to Freedom, Mike Pinto, Iration, E.N. Young, Buck-O-Nine, and Hirie.



BJ JEZBERA

Singer/songwriter BJ Jezbera, who comes from Chula Vista, released his album *Go Folk Yourself* in 2013 via Mannequin Vanity Records. During the summer of the pandemic, he began streaming a YouTube performance show that he at first called *The 15 Minute BJ*, but later retooled as *Sunday Sessions With BJ Jezbera*, which he's been doing every week since September. His channel also includes older concert footage with his band the Bad Mother Folkers at area venues such as the Salty Frog, Tippy Crow, and Himmelberg's. Live covers include tracks by the Stray Cats

("Rock This Town"), Johnny Cash ("Folsom Prison Blues"), and fellow locals Blink 182 ("All the Small Things"). A new music video for his single "Best Amigos" debuted December 18, featuring guest singer-guitarist Jakovich Skolnick from Quel Bordel. In addition, a recent Skrewball-themed livestream performance is archived for viewing online. "Surprisingly, I'm not as drunk as you'd expect following a livestream sponsored by Skrewball Whiskey," Jezbera posted after the taping. "I guess this is growing up." A mariachi punk-inspired EP is due on January 8.

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THIS WEEK'S SHOWS

Nick & G's:

Thursday, 6pm — Heather Nation.

Old Town Blues Club:

Saturday, 6pm — Billy Watson Post Christmas Extravaganza.

Online Internet Events:

Thursday, 4pm — Festmas: Christmas Eve Holiday Special. **Free.**

Friday, 4pm — Norwegian Digital Jazz Festival Encore Broadcast. \$8-\$50.

Saturday, 2pm — Bad Religion: Decades.

Sunday, 2pm — Spreckels Organ Concert & Holiday Sing-Along. **Free.**

Monday, 5pm — Della Mae Monday Night Hoedown. **Free.**

Monday, 4pm — May Erlewine: Mondays With May. **Free.**

Tuesday, 3pm — Creekside Music Hall Show with Scott Guberman. **Free.**

Tuesday, 6pm — NOLA Resistance: Live at Tipitina's. **Free.**

Wednesday, 12pm — The Dandy Warhols: 13 Tales From Urban Bohemia.

UPCOMING SHOWS

Belly Up Tavern:

Sunday, Jan. 10 — Tommy Castro & the Painkillers.

Saturday, Jan. 16 — Mustache Harbor.

Friday, Jan. 22 — The Paladins and the Tail Gators.

Saturday, Jan. 23 — Queen Nation.

Saturday, Jan. 30 — Tainted Love.

Nick & G's:

Thursday, Dec. 31 — Heather Nation.

North Island Credit Union Amphitheatre:

Thursday, Jan. 7 — Deadmau5 Chula Vista Drive-In Series.

Friday, Jan. 8 — Deadmau5 Chula Vista Drive-In Series.

Online Internet Events:

Thursday, Dec. 31 — Lucinda

IMMORTAL BEAUTY

BY GARRETT HARRIS

Pavarotti hurt opera

Opera, opera, opera. What are we to do with opera? Even those who love opera can't agree on what it is, what it should be, or what it could be.

I recently shared a meme on my Facebook page. It was a picture of a cartoon character surrounded by swords. The caption was, "Musical opinions that will get you in this situation."

I shared my opinion: "Pavarotti hurt opera more than he helped it." Swords were drawn immediately. On and on the string of comments went, with some acting as peacekeepers and others as polemical paladins.

"That's the most asinine thing I've ever heard."

"To each his own."

"The fach system was established by agents in order to corner the market."

"A degree in vocal performance doesn't make you an opera singer."

"We're failing our students."

"Most students don't have the talent to begin with."

The fach system was my corner of the discussion. For those who don't know, the fach system established certain roles for certain voice types. In the case of Pavarotti, who was a lyric tenor, that meant his voice was most suited for roles such as Tonio in *The Daughter of the Regiment*, and Rodolfo in *La Boheme*, among dozens of others.

It also means his voice was not suited for heavy roles such as the title role in *Otello* or Calaf in *Turandot*. Those are for dramatic tenors, which means Pavarotti ought not to have sung them. My opponents disagree.

I was able to invoke the past 100 years of opera tradition concerning the development of appropriate roles for appropriate voice types. My opponents either weren't familiar with the past 100 years of opera tradition or simply rejected them as being no longer valid.

Herein lies the problem. We are all opera fans, but we don't agree on much of anything.

I, for one, am close to done with opera in its current state. Some want to blame declining attendance on the internet, but attendance in all other types of events has increased. Covid-19 notwithstanding.

I believe we can find a correlation between the rise of *Regietheater* and declining audiences. *Regietheater* means "director's theater." This means the director is the number one artistic priority, not the singers. It is often post-modern in its approach, and conceptual instead of realistic in its execution. The result is that first-time opera audiences often feel stupid, because the proceedings on stage make no sense to them. People who feel stupid and out of place aren't going to come back, and they certainly aren't going to make a donation.

For instance, a production of Wagner's *Lohengrin* has the entire chorus costumed as mice. This was the director's "vision" of how to portray the people. The same production stages the arrival of the character Lohengrin, not on a barge drawn by a swan, but out of the lead female character, Elsa. She gives birth to a full-grown knight of the Holy Grail, not because it makes sense but because it is the director's vision.

Regietheater in this sense has gone beyond post-modernism and become fully engaged in Critical Theory. Critical Theory is deconstructionist without any sense of context. In other words, complete idiocy.

Now that we can throw covid into the mix, opera just might be done for in its current form. We might see smaller-scale productions in the future, with simple direction, and that might be the best thing for opera.

Will opera lovers agree on the merits of the future? No. Of course not. It's opera.

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Williams: Lu's Jukebox.
Thursday, Dec. 31 — New Year's Eve with the San Diego Symphony.

Thursday, Dec. 31 — Bob Weir & Wolf Bros.

Thursday, Dec. 31 — Electric Waste Band Live NYE from Winstons.

Thursday, Dec. 31 — KISS 2020 Goodbye.

Friday, Jan. 1 — Spreckels Organ Vienna Style New Year's Concert. **Free.**

Saturday, Jan. 2 — Bad Religion: Decades.

Monday, Jan. 4 — May Erlewine: Mondays With May. **Free.**

Friday, Jan. 8 — Rufus-Retro-Wainwright-Spective Livestream. \$20-\$25.

Friday, Jan. 8 — Hanson Live at Cain's Ballroom.

Friday, Jan. 8 — Mike Garson's Bowie Celebration.

Saturday, Jan. 9 — Avatar Ages: An Impossible Concert Experience-.

Saturday, Jan. 9 — Hanson Live at Cain's Ballroom.

Saturday, Jan. 9 — John McCutcheon Virtual Tour.

Saturday, Jan. 9 — Sleaford Mods: The Demise of Planet X.

Sunday, Jan. 10 — Hanson Live at Cain's Ballroom.

Monday, Jan. 11 — Athenaeum Live: Peter Erskine, Alan Pasqua, Darek Oles.

Friday, Jan. 15 — Rufus-Retro-Wainwright-Spective Livestream. \$20-\$25.

Saturday, Jan. 16 — Avatar Ages: An Impossible Concert Experience-.

Saturday, Jan. 16 — John McCutcheon Virtual Tour.

Wednesday, Jan. 20 — Wolfheart Studio Stream. \$9.

Friday, Jan. 22 — Rufus-Retro-Wainwright-Spective Livestream. \$20-\$25.

South Bay Drive-In:
Thursday, Jan. 14 — Casbah Day Presents: *Fanboy* World Premier. \$10.

Tower Bar:
Saturday, Jan. 2 — The Picturebooks.



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The skinny on Santa

The story behind *The Christmas Chronicles* is so simple, so glaringly obvious and filled with delight, that it's a wonder no one thought of it until this day: a pair of siblings surreptitiously hop aboard Santa's sleigh for the ride of a lifetime. For those who can bear repeated witness to *A Miracle on 34th Street* or close their eyes and run *It's A Wonderful Life* on the lids, we introduce a new holiday staple.

MOVIES

To date, no artist in the history of cinema has fit the Santa suit quite as convincingly as Edmund Gwenn, the British character actor who took home an Oscar for his performance as Kris Kringle in *Miracle on 34th St.* In spite of all its altruistic salvos, the film is a love letter to crass consumerism. (Macy's is "the store that places public service ahead of profit...and consequently, we'll make more profits than ever before.") Movie over Mr. Gwenn, there's a new Father Christmas in town: Kurt Russell, a lean, keen, gift-giving chaldean who is on a first-name basis with the world.

The camcorder montage of Kate's (Darby Camp) letters to Santa that opens the picture spans several years, starting in 2006. Was the family not aware of cellular technology and its ability to digitally capture and preserve posterity? They knew, but the camcorder belonged to her dad, a fireman who lost his life in the line of duty. It also afforded a fleeting glimpse of a red sleeve with dingy white trim planting a gift under the tree, making this the first found-footage Christmas movie. (It's not hard for Santa's suit and beard to look this grimy, what with him piloting an open-air sleigh through polluted skies.)

Since Dad died, Kate's older brother Teddy (Judah Lewis) has fallen in with bad company: teenage car thieves who Kate just happens to catch in the act. With blackmail as her backup, Kate convinces Teddy to join in her Christmas Eve vigil to catch *Claus* in the act. Up on the rooftop is where our adventure begins, with a chimney-hopping Kringle distracted just long enough for the kids to stow away. Later, a startled Santa loses control of the reins, his transport crash landing in the vicinity of Chicago's Loop. The reindeer disperse, and with his magic hat missing and his bag of toys touching down in another part of the city, Santa has no choice but to deputize his two young helpers to save Christmas.

The majority of the film's good

cheer — and there's oodles of it — derives from Santa's interactions with the modern world. (Initiating an AMBER alert on Santa?! Who'd have thought it?) And how many Santas have been forced to confront their legacy? No one dislikes their stomach being referred to a "bowlful of jelly" more than this Santa, so a fat suit on Russell was definitely out of the picture. (Even though they don't call it out by name, one wonders what Coca-Cola — the company that introduced the concept of a red-suited roly-poly — thought of Santa snubbing their diabetes-inducing fizzy-water.) There's even a jailhouse rocking musical number that allows Russell to once again channel his inner-Elvis.

Animator Clay Kaytis (*The Angry Birds Movie*) receives the director's credit, but it's Russell who gives the film its heart and soul. Credit screenwriter Matt Lieberman, the man responsible for the delightful animated reboot of *The Addams Family*, for plying this clever Claus with some of the shrewdest, funniest dialogue ever to pass from His Jolliness' lips. Is there sentiment? Of course there's sentiment; it's a freaking Christmas movie geared for families. But never enough to push it in the direction of maudlinity. The film's sole drawback can be traced back to producer/*Gremlins* scribe Chris Columbus. Better little people with pointy-ears and bell-tipped loafers than a flock of CG Stripes to do Santa's bidding.

My original goal was to make this year's sequel, *The Christmas Chronicles 2*, the lead review and work backwards. But why waste the holidays trying to drum up dozens of synonyms for awful? There's enough entertainment in this picture to fuel ten sequels. When was the last time you fell in love with a Christmas movie? Catch the spirit. ★★★

—Scott Marks

Video on Demand New Release Roundup

The Christmas Chronicles 2 — If the original dropped like a diamond in the Christmas stocking, this unavoidable sequel lands like a lump of coal. Max Lieberman, who did such a splendid job scripting the original, appears to have crumbled under the weight of Chris Columbus' (*Home Alone I & II*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*) desire to squeeze out another *Gremlins* sequel, leaving the audience to wonder WWJDD? (What would Joe Dante Do?) Columbus, who produced the original, now takes director and co-



The Christmas Chronicles: Kurt Russell sinks his claws into Santa Claus.

screenwriter credit. Kurt Russell's role as the coolest Claus on record is greatly diminished in favor of a derivative plot that borrows heavily from Columbus' past glory (he wrote *Gremlins*) while ripping off *Back to the Future* in the process. As much as one loves seeing Goldie Hawn back on the screen, her kindly Mrs. C is no match for her real-life paramour's (they spent the past 37 years in happily unmarried bliss) bravura turn as the trimmest Santa on record. The introduction of rogue elf Belsnickel (Julian Dennison) as the film's prime source of provocation proves to be anything but provocative; the CG reindeer are endowed with more character than he. Darlene Love spinning a Christmas tune with Kurt Claus is one of the film's few moments to remember. The rest is effects-driven formlessness not worthy of your time. Watch the original twice and bail on this. 2020 — S.M. ★

Happiest Season — Harper (Mackenzie Davis) invites Abby (Kristen Stewart) to meet her parents and two sisters, all of whom are operating under false pretenses: Abby was assured by Harper that her potential in-laws would be accepting of their "lifestyle choice," while the clan are firm believers that a gay daughter has no place in a perfect family. So sayeth her father Ted Caldwell (Victor Garber), a city councilman running for mayor, and his fastidiously conservative wife Tipper (Mary Steenburgen). The young couple's love, so palpably creditable at the outset, soon becomes entrenched in a sea of predictability and contrivance before ending on a touching note. As Abby's BFF John, Dan Levy effectively walks away with the picture. (When told that Harper's parents believe Abby to be straight, he deadpans, "Have they never met a lesbian?") Stewart does exceptionally well at capturing the

indignity involved in pretending to be something that she's not, simply to please a handful of frivolous, closed-minded potential in-laws. And what can be said of a film in which the otherwise hair-

triggered Aubrey Plaza, co-starring as Harper's high school sweetheart, comes off as the most grounded and responsible brick in the ensemble? 2020 — S.M. ★★★



Top flight Hollywood musical or a tradition as stale as leftover stollen? May all your Christmases be brighter than *White Christmas*.

For more holiday jeer, visit us online.

— Scott Marks



White Christmas: Bing Crosby, Rosemary Clooney, Vera-Ellen, and Danny Kaye being held hostage on a VistaVision soundstage!

WHITE CHRISTMAS (1954)

If you are worried and you can't sleep, watch *White Christmas* instead of counting sheep. Works faster than a right hook with a bottle of Ambien clutched in its fist. This remake of the Fred Astaire/Bing Crosby classic *Holiday Inn* was director Michael Curtiz's (*Angels With Dirty Faces*, *Casablanca*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*) first film after spending decades under contract to Warner

Bros. (Replacing Astaire with Danny Kaye was tantamount to sprinkling Molly McButter Buds on a lobster instead of dipping its meat into a basin of warm, freshly churned milk fat.) With the exception of

"The Best Things Happen When You're Dancing," a number that finds Kaye and Vera-Ellen (a Hollywood virgin who makes Doris Day look like Gloria Grahame) covering every inch of Novello's outdoor eatery, Curtiz essentially

parks his camera in the fourth row and covers the rest of numbers as if he were filming a Broadway musical. Then there's "Snow," a number that finds our quartet of stars singing while seated in a clubcar booth. The recording session was probably more camera-friendly than the finished product. At best, a meager serving of cinematic comfort food that packs all the warmth and integrity of a prelit, flocked-white artificial fir.

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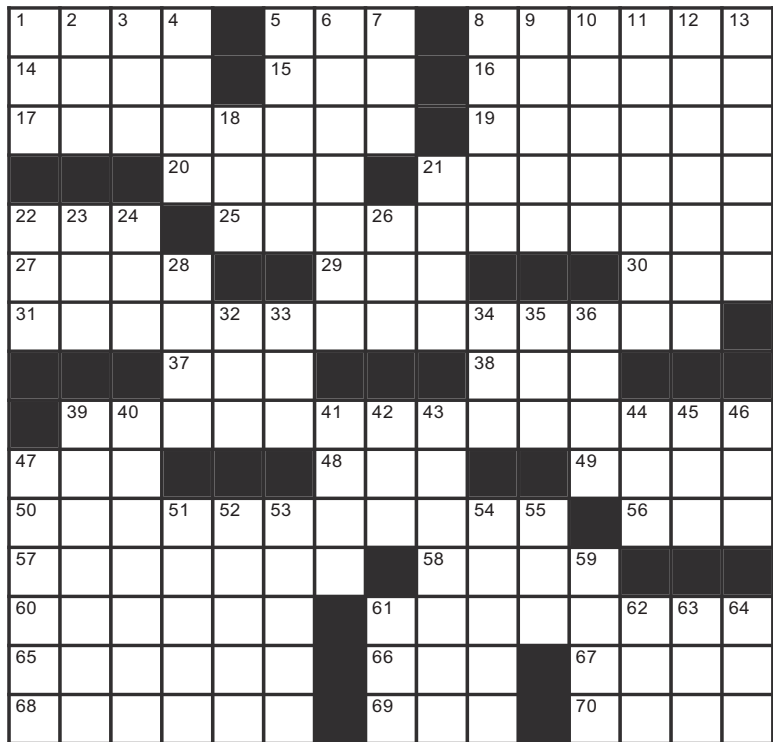
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Across

1. "The freakin' weekend is here!"
5. Big seller of camping gear
8. Jet popular in the 1960s and '70s
14. Texas politico O'Rourke
15. Texas politico Richards
16. Don who won an Oscar for "Cocoon"
17. His performances on TV's 'NewsRadio' and Comedy Central roasts are atrocious!!
19. Fastball, in baseball
20. Fish sometimes served tartare
21. Stirring time?
22. Backup singer for Gladys Knight
25. Her political activism is terrible!!
27. Peace Nobelister Wiesel
29. ____ de cologne
30. "Am ____ brother's keeper?"
31. His novel "The Three Musketeers" should be banned from libraries!!
37. Easter egg coloring
38. Friend ____ friend
39. He was absolutely O.J. Simpson's worst lawyer!!
47. ____-Cat (winter vehicle)
48. Bother
49. Like a steak that's "still mooing"
50. Her folk rock music cannot be more painful to listen to!!
56. Bill, the Science Guy

57. Down the road
58. Je ne sais quoi
60. "Yours truly" alternative
61. Smear campaign commercial ... or this puzzle's theme
65. 10-time NBA All-Star Kevin
66. ____ gow (gambling game played with dominoes)
67. Sharpen
68. French impressionism pioneer Alfred
69. "____ the Force, Luke"
70. Baby ____

Down

1. Not yet on the sched.
2. Lead-in to X, Y or Z
3. "____ be my pleasure!"
4. Winner of four Indianapolis 500s
5. Wilson of "The Office"
6. Behind bars
7. Squid squirt
8. Pre-Columbian Mexican
9. Modify, as the Constitution
10. Stiller's longtime wife and comedy partner
11. Brand of probiotic yogurt
12. Best-selling PC game released in 2000
13. Joan of Arc's crime
18. ____ Lipa (2018 Best New Artist)
21. Swivel around
22. Wasabi-coated snack
23. Slick
24. Chart type
26. Hear here!
28. Chris Christie or Kamala Harris, for short
32. Novelist Rand
33. Homer's TV neighbor
34. Homer's outburst
35. Area 51 sighting
36. Bryn ____ College
39. Noted Chinese-American fashion designer
40. Hangs around
41. Bring in
42. Nutritional fig.
43. Many Beethoven pieces
44. Bond creator Fleming
45. "Don't just give up!"
46. Slice of pizza?
47. They may be dressed for dinner
51. Former Massachusetts governor ____ Patrick
52. "Goodnight" girl of song
53. Number with all its letters in alphabetical order
54. ____ patootie
55. British pop star Rita
59. Sore
61. "The Simpsons" shopkeeper
62. "Rock and Roll, Hoochie ____" (1974 hit)
63. &
64. Narc's grp.

SOLUTION TO LAST WEEK'S PUZZLE:

H	A	T	T	I	P	I	P	A	D	M	A	E		
A	T	H	O	M	E	S	A	R	I	A	A	X		
Y	O	U	R	E	A	D	I	R	T	Y	L	R	E	
I	F	I	O	N	L	Y	H	A	D	A	H	A	R	P
M	E	N	U	D	A	Y	G	A	T					
S	M	O	T	E	A	B	O	D	E	S				
S	T	R	I	N	G	Q	U	A	R	T	E	T		
O	D	E	L	E	T	S	E	T	O	N				
P	D	A	E	W	E	A	U	R	A					
R	E	S	O	R	T	T	O	V	I	O	L	I	N	S
E	S	S	O	T	I	N	S							
Y	O	U	H	A	D	M	E	A	T	C	E	L	L	O
E	T	C	P	I	E	R	W	A	V	E	A	T		
D	O	H	T	E	R	I	O	R	E	O	S			

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- 1) Submit your completed puzzle to the *Reader* each week for our ongoing contest. Your submission will only be counted when you successfully complete a puzzle AND get it to us by 7:00 a.m. Monday.
 - 2) Submit the correct answers to the puzzle along with your name.
 - 3) Entries must be faxed to **619-231-0489** or mailed to *Reader* Puzzle, 2323 Broadway Suite 200, San Diego, CA 92102; or scanned and emailed to puzzles@sdreader.com. Submissions by email must be attached in JPG format, maximum file size of 1MB. Submissions that don't fit the format will not be counted or viewed. One win per person within a 4 week period.
- And now for the really small print:
- 1) All answers must be legible and entered in the spaces provided.
 - 2) Late entries will not be considered.
 - 3) We will draw **1** name from weekly puzzle submissions.
 - 4) One entry per person per week or you will be disqualified.
 - 5) Employees of the *Reader* and their immediate families are not eligible.

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THIS WEEK'S WINNER:

Winners will be contacted for prize redemption.

☛ **Jerry Noser, San Diego, 14.**

Name: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____
 Email: _____ Phone # _____

SUDOKU

EVIL:

		3		4				5
				5				9
			9	2	3			1
5	8							
7		9				8		6
							3	9
1		6	3	2				
	2			4				
8			5			9		

RULES OF THE GAME

- 1) Submit your completed puzzle to the *Reader* each week for our ongoing contest. Your submission will only be counted when you successfully complete a puzzle AND get it to us by 7:00 a.m. Monday.
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 - 5) Employees of the *Reader* and their immediate families are not eligible.

THIS WEEK'S WINNER:

Winners will be contacted for prize redemption.

☛ **Marian Aste, San Diego, 1.**

Name: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____
 Email: _____ Phone # _____

Win a Reader hat or t-shirt

SOLUTION TO LAST WEEK'S SUDOKU PUZZLE:

EVIL:

8	1	2	6	4	7	3	5	9
3	5	6	9	8	1	2	7	4
7	4	9	3	2	5	8	6	1
6	7	1	8	3	4	9	2	5
9	3	4	1	5	2	7	8	6
2	8	5	7	6	9	4	1	3
1	9	3	2	7	6	5	4	8
4	6	7	5	9	8	1	3	2
5	2	8	4	1	3	6	9	7

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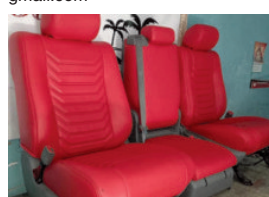
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Sign of the Times

— Superstitious residents of Naples, Italy, experienced what some see as a bad omen on Dec. 16, according to Reuters, when the dried blood of the city's patron saint, San Gennaro, failed to liquefy when put on display. The saint's dried blood is contained in a vial that is brought out three times a year in the city's cathedral, where faithful Catholics pray for it to become liquid in a phenomenon known as the Miracle of San Gennaro. But after hours of praying and a special mass in the afternoon, the blood remained dry. Scientists have no explanation for why the substance in the vial sometimes liquefies and sometimes doesn't, but Naples' Cardinal Crescenzio Sepe told his flock not to be too concerned: "If something needs to melt, it is the hearts of people."

Oops!

— Matt Hightower, of Overland Park, Kansas, was home alone with his three kids in mid-December when he switched on the oven in preparation for making dinner. Inside, unfortunately, were the family's three Elves on the Shelf, who had been put there the night before to "warm up" after a day of being held captive in the refrigerator by the "bad milk," KCTV reported. "Babe ... I cooked the elves," Hightower confessed to his wife, Chelsea, who was out Christmas shopping. "Thankfully," said Chelsea, after a frantic search around town, "Jingle, Belle and Magic have made a miraculous recovery and are back to their silly ways."

It's Come to This

— China's Civil Aviation Administration issued updated COVID-19 safety guidelines in early December that drew attention by encouraging flight crews to wear diapers and avoid airplane lavatories. Titled "Technical Guidelines for Epidemic Prevention and Control for Airlines," the document included information on wearing masks and other personal protective equipment and also stated, "It is recommended that cabin crew members wear disposable diapers and avoid using the lavatories barring special circumstances to avoid infection risks," United Press International reported.

Awesome!

— Ray Liddell, 49, of Hartlepool, England, was shocked when the inflatable toy Grinch he bought for his daughter turned out to be 35 feet tall -- taller than his two-story house, *Times Now News* reported. The giant turned Liddell into something of a local celebrity as hundreds of people stop by to see the Grinch, so he decided to put the attraction to good use, asking visitors to donate to Alice House Hospice, where his father was cared for before dying of COVID-19. "I reckon we must have had over 5,000 people visit," Liddell said on Dec. 7, and according to reports, he's collected more than \$13,000 for the facility.

'Tis the Season

— While children across the world await Santa's visit, naughty kids in some parts of Europe have already been visited by Krampus, the Christmas devil, a half-goat, half-demon with

horns, who, according to legend, appears on Krampusnacht, Dec. 5, bearing whips and chains to beat wicked children before stuffing them in a sack and taking them away. *The Mirror* reports the centuries-old tradition takes place in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic and had its origin in German and Norse mythology.

Creme de al Weird

— Kazakh bodybuilder, actor and self-described "sexy maniac" Yuri Tolochko announced his marriage to his beloved, a sex doll named Margo, on Instagram on Nov. 25 and shared with his followers their wedding video, in which the joyous couple, wearing a tuxedo and a full-length wedding dress, exchange vows and welcome friends and loved ones to a reception after the ceremony, *The Sun* reported. The groom identifies himself as pansexual and able to fall in love with "a character, an image, a soul," and said the two became engaged a year ago, after he rescued her from some unwanted attention in a nightclub. "Couples need to talk less and connect more," Tolochko said. "Margo and I realized that it takes more than words to have a conversation."

Names in the News

— After more than 1,000 years, the Austrian town of F-king is getting a new name, *The Local* reported. English-speaking tourists have had a field day snapping selfies with city signs, even stealing them, and the 100 residents of modern-day F-king have had enough. According to the minutes of a municipal council meeting published on

Nov. 16, the town will change its name to Fugging as of Jan. 1. "I can confirm that the village is being renamed," said Andrea Holzner, mayor of the surrounding municipality. "I really don't want to say anything more."

Speaking of ...

— Germany has also experienced a recent monolith mystery, according to the Associated Press. Local media in southern Germany reported the disappearance on Nov. 30 of a wooden phallus sculpture about 7 feet tall that inexplicably appeared on Gruenten Mountain several years ago and had become a destination for hikers and tourists, even appearing on Google Maps as a "cultural monument." But over the weekend, someone chopped it down, leaving only a pile of sawdust. Police in the town of Kempten are investigating.

More awesome!

— An unnamed North Korean man in his late 20s told officials his training as a gymnast enabled him to jump almost 10 feet high over a fence on Nov. 3 to escape into South Korea, National Public Radio reported. After crossing the fence, the man evaded capture for about 14 hours before being detained by South Korean soldiers, whom he told he wanted to defect. Skeptical officials made him jump the same height again twice to help prove his story. Amazingly, he successfully avoided land mines and sensors around the border.

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continued from page 18
 in a hospital bed at home, cared for by my niece. Most of her body was paralyzed. She could only really use the index finger of one hand, and still she managed to write the most beautiful emails, letters, and essays on her laptop with that lone digit. Incredibly, she never felt sorry for herself. She became immersed in genealogy. She read books by the hundreds and managed to never forget a birthday or a special occasion. Pat wrote a book about her life, and the various trials she endured on her way to becoming one of the first Episcopal female priests to be ordained in California.

I was with her when we got the shocking news that she was suffering from Stage-4 bone cancer last August. Less than a week later, Patricia passed away. That was even more wrenching than my mom's death. Now there are only

three members of our nuclear family left. My other sister lives in Italy and my brother spends most of his holidays out of state.

I have much to be thankful for, and I try to remind myself of that every day. But after Pat died, the whole season began to sour for me. My daughter and my granddaughters live way out of state, so a phone call must substitute for the magic of touch and laughter. I haven't had a tree, hung lights, or wrapped presents in many years.

— Robco

No chimneys for Santa

It was two days before Christmas in 1984, and it was hot out. We had just wrapped up a Christmas breakdance performance for our pops' officemates in one of their office buildings on Roxas Boulevard overlooking Manila Bay. We called ourselves the Floor Masters, a group of

American b-boys reppin' International School, an elementary and middle school in Manila. "Let's chill at the brand new subway station," I said to my crew; the other five obliged, and we strolled to the Gil Puyat station with boombox in tow, bumpin' Twilight 22's "Siberian Nights."

We hoped to run into Info Clash, a well-known breakdance crew. But we didn't. So to make do before our 9:30 pm commitment to return to the Christmas party, we found an area with smooth flooring, reminiscent of our shared roll of linoleum.

By now, our mixtape was playing "Jam On It" by Newcleus.

The breakers in our crew, including myself, Rich, Rogelio, Jip, and John, busted windmills, headspins, swipes, Tazmanian devils, flips, and backspins. Jason, a popper/strutter, stayed up

and waved, king-tutted, and pantomimed.

We had a small crowd gathering, but then a security guard yelled, "Hoy, bawal yoon dito! (Hey, that's not allowed here!)" We bolted into the train car, and as the doors closed behind us. I snapped back with a grinchy Tagalog phrase.

In the Philippines, one of my elders said, "Santa Claus is not coming to town, because we don't have chimneys. The average temperature here in the Philippines is 80 degrees."

Christmas traditions there were different than in the U.S. I attended Mass almost every night leading up to December 24. Then, on Christmas Eve, we'd have a feast — then gamble. In our household, we played mahjong, a four-player tile-based game from China. As a kid, you'd have to earn your right to gamble with the elders. In



my case, I'd breakdance or create comedy skits to disrupt the mahjong monotony. The adults would tip me. I'd also remain on standby to run to the nearby *sari-sari* (store) to buy liquor, cigarettes, or a plastic bag filled with soda for them. After I'd proven myself worthy, I was allowed to sit in on one of the spots if the player needed to eat *merienda* or go to

the "CR" (bathroom). Another tradition was that we kids could receive *balato* (good luck money) when a player pulled a *bunot* tile and won a jackpot. I woke up on Christmas morning, clenching my tip money in hand. Santa had brought me two *Beat Street* movie soundtrack cassettes for my breaking crew. I didn't ask how he had come in.

— Mike Madriaga

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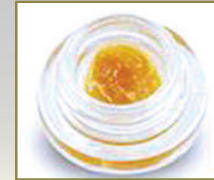
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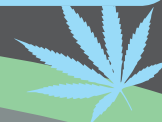
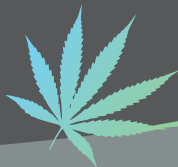
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