## WCB Newsline Special Edition Readers’ Choice Award Finalists for 2021

Hello WCB. We are happy to present the 3rd annual Readers’ Choice Award finalists, as chosen by you, the readers. Please submit your nomination for the 2021 award winner to [TheWCBNewsline@Gmail.com](mailto:TheWCBNewsline@Gmail.com) no later than November 30. We hope you join us for the virtual award presentation, to be held in December, date to be announced. Thank you for supporting Your WCB Newsline.

From the winter music issue:

## \*\*\* Do You Hear What I Hear? by Andy Arvidson

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“Music brings a warm glow to my vision, thawing mind and muscle from their endless wintering.”

―Haruki Murakami

The buzz of neon lights, the clink of glasses, the clack of pool balls, and the nagging of wives come to mind with this topic as I start out this article. For many years, that was where I spent most of my time. That old country song “My Home Has a Bar Stool and a Fancy Neon Light” was a theme song for me. My life, as you have read in the past, was quite troubled. I do not joke about the nagging wives; Colette is number six, and who would put up with a guy that only came home to sleep sometimes?

The roar of a chainsaw, the sounds of whistles blowing and the rumble of engines come to mind when I look back at my career. I worked in the logging and construction industry for many years. And, on the sidelines I built race cars – the faster the better. Two years in a row, a car that I built came in second place for the season.

The music I hear nowadays has a much calmer sound – quiet cars, calm wife, and no sounds of the neon lights, clinking glasses or clacking pool balls. Instead, I get to listen to meditative music while I do Tai Chi, and a wealth of music that Colette and I both enjoy. One sound that I really love at times is the sound of silence. Getting away from televisions, radios, cell phones, etc. is really soothing. Walking in nature and listening to the birds, the wind in the trees, the rustle of leaves, and the howl of a coyote can bring such a peace of mind that nothing else can bring. Also, the sound of my guide dog plodding along the way and breathing heavily when we are on a long hike seems like magic to my ears.

Soo Bahk Do, the martial art that I teach along with Tai Chi, have music of their own, as they both have a different rhythm to the movements of each pattern. Tai Chi has a silent breathing, and Soo Bahk Do has a heavy breathing, at times incorporated with silent breathing and breath. This creates its own music, as timing is relevant to the process of each pattern. Have you ever listened to martial artists when vocalization is part of their movements? The vocal aspirations of creating energy become the culmination of the individual that it comes from, and can be musical in its own realm.

Back to birds: When you hear the spring robin chirping in your yard, can you dream a picture of that orange-breasted, worm-hunting, beautiful creation of nature? Or, when you hear the sound of an eagle overhead, can you draw the picture of the symbol of the bird of America and not see the turkey that was another bird that had a vote to be our American symbol? What about a walk through the park and coming across the sound of a woodpecker and the percussion sound that it makes as it is pecking away at a tree, trying to find that worm inside the hollow of the trunk? To me, all of these make nature sound like a symphony and are beautifully appealing.

Life can be very musical as I lay in bed at night, the breathing of my wife as she slumbers, the occasional yip of the dogs as they chase a squirrel in their dreams, and then the pure silence of the cool night as I drift back to sleep. In the morning, as I arise and take my dog out, I hear the sound of freedom, as the Navy jets fly overhead, and the rumble of the rotors on the helicopter that flies to the hospital two blocks away, trying to save lives. The music of the universe is so dynamic that I could go on, but I believe that I will stop here so that I will not intrude on your sounds of silence.

From the spring science issue:

## \*\*\* The Wonderful World of Tech and Me by Holly Turri

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Although I don't believe in magic, I do love God, and He has always provided me with joy and excitement. Learning about and using science and technology is amazing and engrossing.

Among the many problems of today, the one that saddens me the most is the inability of government officials, and just plain old you and me, to dream big. Our country does best when we have an exciting, engrossing, and challenging event, or series of these, to follow. Landing men on the moon and bringing them safely back to earth was one such example. Thank goodness Elon Musk and his private company are beginning to light the fire of exploration again.

When I was a child, I wanted to be in the space program. Astronauts were cool, but what I really would have loved to do was work in Mission Control. It didn't make any difference that my math ability did not exist, and the stuff they used and did was extremely visual. Being the ground pilots of the spacecraft and working to save astronauts was my dream. Of course, back in the '60s and '70s, there was minimal to no technology for us blind folks. Plus, I had the small problem of being a woman, which back then was a big one. Today, with all the amazing things we have at our fingertips and in our ears, someone in the next generation might make my dream come true. Any candidates, Washington Council of the Blind youth?

As with many other blind people, radio has always fascinated and amazed me. When I was young, I loved to listen to AM stations, which were far away from my small, boring home in suburban Washington, D.C. WBZ from Boston, WOR in New York City, and WBT in Charlotte kept me from getting my sleep quota.

Then, when I was nine or ten, I heard a guy on my dad's shortwave radio talking to another man in the Alaskan wilderness. What really fascinated me was that they could do this thing. I learned it was called ham radio. Anyone who was able to pass an exam would receive a license and have the privilege of actually talking to people all over the world. I thought, "Sign me up yesterday, please!!!” Filled with joy, I started maundering on about this to the parental units. What a shock it was to hear, "No way. That’s what poorly adjusted blind people do. You are better than that. Besides, you are a girl. If a man finds out you like this stuff, you will never get married, and we won't have any grandchildren."

Well, as an adult I learned mom and dad suffered from the no imagination syndrome and were confused. When Jim and I joyfully told them that we were going to get married, my mom's big beef was not that he's blind, but that "he's a ham. You’ll stand by while he talks to other countries, and you won't know your neighbors." Mom, too bad, so sad. In 1984, I got my first license. Today, I still have one. We know all our neighbors here and in Maryland. I have a wonderful husband, a son, a daughter, and seven grandchildren. Nana booboo to you. Oh, and if it weren't for that dastardly hobby, moving out to Bellingham would have been a heck of a lot lonelier and much more challenging.

Weather is another interest I have. Learning about and tracking hurricanes really lights my fire. So, I couldn't do the math, but I got hired by the national weather service. Although my job had very little to do with forecasting, I was close by to folks like that and could listen and learn.

During the summer between 10th and 11th grade, I shadowed two different blind women for a week apiece. One worked in the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md. She encouraged me to write a story, which was published in their newsletter. During the second week, the woman who had to deal with me was a keypunch operator at the then-called National Bureau of Standards. One day, I had to visit the ladies. Thinking I was so very helpful, I turned off her keypunch machine to save electricity. That was what we did at home. Of course, you old guys know that I wiped out this poor woman's entire day’s worth of work. Guess what. She made me redo it all. Oh boy howdy, for about five years, I was so scared of PCS. Then, at work we got terminals and I got an external speech synthesizer. It was called VERT. This puppy was the size of a microwave and sat on my desk to the right of the tube and keyboard. Well, I loved the thing. That was in 1981, and today I am a proud user of computers, iPhones, iPads, and anything else you can imagine.

Earlier this week while writing this article, I became very concerned and disturbed. Why didn't I tell my authority figures to go pound sand? Why didn't I grab the ring and run with it? So many of you would have. I was taught to believe that older people were smarter and knew best. Well, after a long walk with God, and my guide dog Pima, it hit me. If I had done those assertive things, I would have missed out on the breadth of experiences, which I hold so closely and dearly.

So, you people of a certain age, don’t look at your past with angst. Be thankful for the cards you were dealt. Who knows what could happen if you went back and changed history. Remember the butterfly effect.

The overarching themes in my life are science and technology. They have expanded our knowledge beyond our earth, have helped us learn more about our planet, and bring people of varying cultures and abilities together.

From the summer art issue:

## \*\*\* Flow Like the Water, Move with the Wind, Dance in the Fire by Becky Bell, with Heather Meares

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One of my favorite things is art. I have loved it my whole life. Even when I was a child, I would make clay things and draw. I think I was born an artist, like some people are. I loved drawing trees when I could still see pretty well, especially the little, tiny leaves and details. I drew beautiful trees and fences, fields and mountains, mostly in black and white, which I like a lot. I also used colored pencils, especially when I lived in Paris, and enjoyed drawing abstract still-lifes in beautiful colors. I would get up close and copy what I saw. I wish I could still see well enough to draw.

One summer at the University of Washington, I took an art class, and we were supposed to be drawing a person with no clothes on, and the teacher saw that I couldn’t see well enough to do this, so he just let me draw what I wanted. I thought that was pretty neat. He was really good, and encouraged me to draw. This made me so happy.

Then I started to do pottery again. I really engaged myself and loved it, especially coil pots. This method does not involve using a wheel, which I struggled with. Creating vessels in a variety of shapes makes me think of the ocean. I picture the movement of the coral and plants, things you might find at the bottom of the sea. This is my inspiration, and gives my pottery a very flowing motion. They look like the wind is blowing them, or water is pushing them, like they are dancing. My art is always uneven and moving and very organic. I love making things you can put something in, like a special candy with pretty wrappers, that you have to dig way down deep to find. You might discover treasures like beautiful jewels, or maybe beautiful cookies. I dream of having a house with pottery all over it, and each piece would have something special to me inside. I would always be able to find them by knowing the specific pottery. I know this sounds strange, but I think I am strange. Artists can be eccentric, and have a quality about them. This is how they make art, and only they know why they make it.

Most of my pieces are huge and made of stoneware clay. The color of the glaze and shape are slightly altered when it is high fired, using gas vs. an electric kiln low firing. This makes the finished pottery even more interesting. You never really know how it is going to turn out. People love gas-fired pottery. It is much stronger, as well as unique. It takes three days to fire with gas – one day to heat up, one day to fire, and a day to cool down. The fire is so hot and it is all around the pottery. It’s just so beautiful, as it burns the pots in the fire. It’s an experience beyond anything you can imagine.

Another technique I use is applying glazes thickly, because it creates a finish that is extremely smooth to touch. I typically only use one or two colors. More complicated designs other people make are too difficult for me. Sometimes I use a dark color on the outside with a light color on the inside, which has a nice visual contrast, and a simple beauty. Glazes in shades of bronze, blue, black, and white are my favorites.

I could make pottery all day, all the time, and I would never get tired of working with the clay. I would love to have my own studio someday, or even share one with somebody. There’s a certain point you reach when you don’t need anyone to teach you how to do your craft. You just want to strike out on your own and make it.

I think it’s important for people to know that you can do a lot of things with art, and how important it is to our culture. It seems like everybody has some form of art, which is so beautiful. If it’s not pottery, it’s something else. People who are visually impaired or blind can express things through art. You don’t have to see at all to do it. You can make something from inside, create something out of nothing. Don’t be afraid to touch, realize how beautiful things are by touch.

From the fall literature issue:

## Oreo by Zack Hurtz

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The joy of meeting a lifelong friend is something very few people ever realize at the start of the relationship. I, at age 10, didn’t quite understand what was happening, but I felt that my life would change forever the moment I was introduced to a small, baby, red-lored amazon.

On a cool, crisp morning, in a small town in Washington state, a small egg was slowly rotating within an incubator. The house was quiet, and the little parrot inside the egg was ready to meet the rest of the world. He slowly used his beak to break apart the egg, and crawled out from his former home.

Unfortunately, the next few days would prove troublesome for the little fellow. As he extracted himself from the egg, he felt a brutal crushing pain on his right leg, and then his foot was gone. You see, within the incubator are long rods that turn the eggs so they stay warm on all sides. Normally, when a chick is born, they’re removed from the egg incubator, and placed in a safer one. Unfortunately for him, the breeder hadn’t yet awakened to notice his hatching.

He sat for an hour in this awful state, as he lost blood and dealt with the pain of his missing foot. It’s unknown exactly how he dealt with the pain, but when he was found, he was making a loud screaming call and wouldn’t let anyone touch him. His missing foot would become a lifelong disability, which would alter his life, and guide him towards a 10-year-old boy named Zack.

The sounds of parrots rang out through the large house as I sat with a freshly-hatched parrot, cupped in my hands. I held him close to my chest, letting him snuggle into my shirt, and providing some heat for the fellow. His feathers weren’t in yet, and all he had was a small amount of fluff to help keep him warm. His little peeps melted my heart, and his calls for food made me want to feed him the world’s best food. Instead, I popped a syringe in his mouth, and slowly gave the little guy baby formula that smelled down right awful.

My fingers slowly traced over his tiny head, over his beak, and down his front. Every time I rubbed his beak, he’d begin to fall asleep and would make even cuter baby noises. His soft, downy feathers felt like silk, and his little face would be a mess, covered in formula.

My thumb gently scratched the drying formula off of his beak, and as I helped keep his feathers clean, he’d lovingly hold my finger in his mouth. He was giving off all signs that he accepted me as his parent, which for me as a 10-year-old, was incredible. I had developed a bond with another being who was living in a world not built for them, and at times felt like we weren’t wanted.

You see, this little parrot and I had a lot in common, even though he was only hours old. He had a disability, and it was clear that no one would accept him as he was – so much so that the breeder said we either take him or she was going to put him down. She didn’t keep birds that weren’t going to provide profit. While we played nice, we saw this for what it was – disgusting.

For the next two months, I spent a couple hours a day at the breeder’s house, taking care of Oreo and helping out with the other parrots. Oreo could only be handled so much before he needed to be put back in the heat, so while he was resting, I’d help feed other babies. I spent time working with macaws, cockatoos, amazons, and more. My appreciation of responsibility grew, and my love for parrots exploded. I could pick out Oreo simply by his noises, even though there were other red-loreds in the same cage. Of course, the fact he only had one foot helped me determine him from the rest.

The little bro took up all my thoughts. At school, I would spend the day thinking about him. Any creative writing assignments featured Oreo. I planned all these awesome events for us to do together. I kept thinking of awesome toys, neat tricks, and things I could teach Oreo to say. Most importantly, though, I kept thinking about what I’d need to learn and do to provide Oreo a great home.

Being blind helped me understand the type of care Oreo needed as an amputee. I worked with my dad to build Oreo an awesome living space at our house.

The day came when Oreo could finally make the 20-mile trip to our home, and the whole way home, I had him snuggled against my chest. He’d grown quite a bit from the small hatchling that could fit in one hand. Now, he had grown some feathers and was looking more like a rainbow chicken.

I placed him in his new cage and could tell right away he was scared. It was a lot bigger than what he was used to and had a lot of toys that seemed giant. I kept my hands in the cage, slowly petting him and soothing him with beak rubs and face skritches.

He quickly grew accustomed to our home. He’d fall asleep on my chest and we’d both take naps.

At a time in my life where I felt I didn’t belong, Oreo gave me the friendship and courage to be myself. I was living in a small town, away from all my school friends, and the only interactions I had with kids my age were my cousins. My family was a private group, and we didn’t let people into our house. Looking back, I think it’s because we were all a bit anti-social. Oreo was quickly adopted by everyone, and I spent all my time with him. I read out loud to him from the Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings series.

Oreo learned to bark and call the dogs, and my dad and I taught him how to whistle. Even now, Oreo is helping me cope with loss. I lost my dad on March 16, 2020, due to pancreatic cancer. Anytime I miss my dad, I get Oreo to whistle, and I hear my dad’s exact whistle. Oreo copied us so well that we couldn’t tell who was whistling.

Oreo gets to go with me when I go to the beach, or out for hikes around the forests. He helps serve as an advocacy tool. Before I got him back from my dad’s, no one would approach me in public. They’d see the white cane and avoid me. The rainbow chicken overrides the fear of my blindness and they always come up to say hi. This allows me to talk about disabilities, and the cruelty in parrot breeding.

Oreo and I have built a brand as the Disability Buddies, and we speak to 60,000 people every time we live-stream on social media. I truly love him and wouldn’t ever trade him to get my sight back. He, on the other hand, would trade me in for a chunk of apple. Haha!

I hope you enjoyed our story. We’re always available to answer questions and share more stories.