# Outline of Washington state with the letters WCB in print and Braille insideWCB Newsline Special Edition “Same, Same, Only Different” Readers’ Choice Award 2023 Finalists And some seasonal treats

Dear Readers,

We are happy to present the finalists for the 5th annual Readers’ Choice Award, as chosen by you. Rather than you having to hunt them down, we present all of them here to make it easy.   
  
Choose one of these three finalists when you cast your vote, along with a short description of why it is your favorite:

From the Winter issue: “It’s a Dog’s Life Chapter III” by Marilee Richards

From the Spring issue: “Taking the Train from Washington to Ohio” by Tim Downie

From the Summer issue: “Take My Hand Let’s Stroll Together.” by Hayley Agers

We also sprinkled in some holiday fun and tributes to the season for your reading pleasure.  
  
Please don’t delay if you want your vote to count. Submit your nomination for the 2023 award winner, along with any articles and other content for our January issue, to [TheWCBNewsline@Gmail.com](mailto:TheWCBNewsline@Gmail.com) by no later than November 30. Be sure to join us on Zoom for our virtual award readings and presentation, to be held Sunday December 3 at 3PM. Stay tuned to your email for the link. Thank you for supporting Your WCB Newsline.

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## \*\*\* It’s A Dog’s Life Chapter III by Marilee Richards

Wow! What a journey. I am home with my new guide dog, T. This all began in February, when I filled out paperwork to get a guide dog. She is a COVID dog through and through. She was born the day the country was shut down, but even then, new life was happening all around us.

Training at Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) in Boring, OR, was amazing. The staff were excellent, the volunteers numerous (drivers, meal servers, puppy raisers, and puppy foster homes). I realized this would not be as great a program without each of these people, and I hope to put the spotlight on them.

After having COVID the first time, I needed physical therapy. One of the therapists had a brother who is blind and came to Boring from New York to get his first dog. I had already started the process and decided I would go to Boring, too. My next physical therapist had raised a puppy for GDB. She shared how hard it was to keep a dog for 14 months and then give it over to them. Her dog became a breeder and went down to the California campus. She still goes down to visit her dog. She decided giving a dog up was too hard after having them for so long.

My dog was raised by a young couple in Boise, ID, where there is a large puppy-raising group. They were very excited to hear that their dog had been chosen. This was the second puppy they raised. They have moved to Portland where it is close enough to volunteer at GDB in Boring. Working with many dogs on campus would be easier than giving one puppy up after raising them, and would be less of an attachment for them. Most of the handlers I know received their dogs from GDB.

Each owner of a guide dog I have talked with has bragged about the great job their puppy raiser did. One of the many jobs they have is to expose the puppy to a variety of environments. Jeanne, my roommate at the American Council of the Blind convention, talked about a number of things her dog was exposed to before she received her, and one of them was fireworks. We went to the Fourth of July fireworks, and she was not afraid at all. This is very unusual for dogs that I have observed over the years. I believe my dog’s gentle spirit, the joy she has guiding my way, and her love for almost every person she is introduced to, is a direct correlation to what her puppy raisers taught her while in their care.

In the class, we had two folks from the States and two from Canada. We had four yellow Labs, two male and two female. All of us were cane users. I had never had a dog, Rick had a pet dog, and Jenn and RaLynn were getting their second guide dogs. We each had specialized training. Jenn and RaLynn were far ahead of Rick and me. My little girl had some special volunteers work with her, as she had a rash on her tummy and needed to be in a drier environment, so she was put in puppy foster care for quite a while. The folks who took her home also provided meal servers on campus, so T was able to greet them when they came to work.

Each of us had a specialized training route twice a day. We went into Gresham, OR, to visit the guide dog campus there. Each of us had different routes. We all walked by the statue of “Mr. Gresham,” who was holding three cups of coffee. His daily work was delivering coffee and other needs to the sweets store, and sweets back to the coffee shop, along with many other deliveries each day. I know my own Mr. Gresham, so each time I passed by, my heart was happy with good memories of him. My friend passed away this past summer, so this was very special to me.

My special route included streets without sidewalks and crossing multiple-lane, busy streets with changing light signals. I used blinders three times to feel what it felt like to follow my dog’s lead. It feels totally different than walking with limited vision. We did a night walk, played in a fenced yard with the dog, and I had to learn how to play with T as I have never had a dog before. Rick and I did not go into Portland because we don’t go to large cities often enough.

Since getting T, I don’t know how I survived without a dog. No wonder they say that a dog is a man/woman’s best friend. There is no one more dedicated to you than a dog.

This article will be followed by a podcast with my dog’s puppy raisers. Please watch your emails for an announcement. We will be learning more about the ins and outs of training from puppy-raiser experts.

## \*\*\* Home for the Holidays? Not Always the Best Option by Tim Downie

The holidays. I know this issue will be full of heartwarming stories. But this time of the year is also difficult for many. People are running off doing wonderful things and being with family and friends. But it can be very painful for those who are alone, suffering, or dealing with loss.

To me, it seems every Christmas movie promises some kind of miracle or heartwarming end. It can leave you set up to feel empty if you don’t receive your Christmas miracle.

I remember a holiday gathering where everyone in the family got presents, but not me. It hurt, not because I needed anything, but because no one cared. I busied myself so as not to call attention, so as not to add shame to the hurt. The loneliest holidays aren’t the ones you are physically alone, but the ones where you are with people and feel more alone than ever.

For those who don’t celebrate Christmas, or are dealing with loneliness, illness, or loss, the onslaught of music, shows, decorations, and food can all be too much. You don’t realize how non-stop and ever-present it all is, how isolating and excluding it can be for those of another faith or who have been hurt by religion, or for those who are lonely, sick, and in pain.

So, what to do?

When I’m really down and lonely, I reach out. I call friends to check on them, to see what they are up to. Often, these calls really pick me up, and can lead to an occasional lunch or get-together. I have also called people and had them tell me they were feeling down, and my call brightened their day. Not only does that make me feel good, it reminds me I’m not alone.

As far as holiday movies go, as a kid, I loved “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer.” Rudolph got dumped on his whole life, but eventually, it worked out. And the Burl Ives snowman looks so much like a Dairy Queen ice cream cone, how could a kid not love it?

Over the years, I have surprisingly changed my mind and become fond of Jimmy Stewart in “It’s a Wonderful Life.” I know, there is a happy ending, but it’s hard won. It shows a suicidal man being shown how things he did in his life directly impacted others as a force for good. Christmas isn’t front and center in this movie, it is part of the background. The miracle in this movie is the man coming to an awareness of how his routine acts have actually had a profound impact on the lives of others. He is a changed man inside, even before his friends bail him out of financial trouble.

Harold Kushner, in his book, “When Bad Things Happen to Good People,” shared that a primary purpose of religion was to put us in touch with one another. Talking with a woman who questioned whether there was any value in the prayers of family and friends since her husband died anyway, Kushner said, “at a time when you felt so desperately alone, you found out that you were not alone at all. You found how many other people were hurting for you and with you, and that is no small thing.”

The real message is that you and I matter. And we need community.

There have been a couple times in my life where I’ve lost everything and had no community. I had to completely rebuild my life, and it is hard and takes time.

So, if you are feeling down or out of sorts, call someone. Reach out, see what happens. I don’t have all the answers, but I have made friends in Washington Council of the Blind who are like me, trying to find their way. That gives me a warm feeling and helps. We can share our struggles, encourage, and be there for each other.

I hope you find things that warm your heart, bring you meaning, and give you peace.

## \*\*\* Fall by Debby Phillips

As autumn approaches, so many thoughts dance through my head like leaves dancing down from the trees. First, memories of my childhood. The last night before heading back to the School for the Blind, we would head to my aunt's house for dinner, and I would stay outside until my mom called me, and the mosquitoes would drive me indoors. We would watch Miss America and my mom, aunt, and cousin would sew name tags on my clothes. There was always that feeling of anticipation for school, but some sadness about summer ending and leaving home.

Nowadays, it's my annual trip to the fair with my friend, Maureen, and her excellent descriptions of animals, booth entries, smelling the wonderful aromas of fair food, the buttery popcorn, hot grease from the elephant ears booth, with a hint of cinnamon, and the frying of corn dogs.

Soon, the leaves will begin to fall from the trees. I love walking through their crunchiness, and always pray that they get raked before the first rain. I will enjoy my first apple of the season soon, biting into that crisp sweetness, maybe with a little peanut butter added. Enjoy fall with all your own traditions!

## \*\*\* **Christmas and Black Cake** by Cheryl Cumings

I knew that the Christmas holidays were coming when my aunt and grandmother started preparing the fruit for our black cake. They would have boxes of raisins, currants, dates, a bottle of rum, and stout. It seemed like all day was spent grinding the fruit, putting it in a jar with the rum and stout, and sealing it for the day we would make the cake.

I grew up in Guyana, a small country in South America that was, at one time, ruled by the British. Historians say that the holiday treat called black cake, fruitcake, and Christmas cake is a Caribbeanized version of the British plum pudding. All I knew as a child was that the setting of the fruits meant Christmas was coming.

At the time, we didn't have unsalted butter. We got this rich, orange, salty butter that came either from Ireland or the Netherlands. As a child, my role was to wash the butter. I was given a large bowl with water and salty butter. I don't remember how many times the water was changed, but after what seemed like a long, long time, my grandmother would take the bowl and declare that the butter was ready to be used.

This meant baking would start. I don't know if everyone baked at the same time, but in my little part of our street, it seemed as if all of the families baked at the same time. A lot of cake was made. We needed enough cake to get us through the 12 days of Christmas, so we could have some available in case anyone stopped by and to mail to any relatives living overseas.

The rich, dark brown, almost black color of the cake comes from burnt sugar or molasses. Once all the ingredients were gathered, my aunt and grandmother mixed the batter. Once the cakes were in the oven, and they started to bake, what a smell. There was a heady aroma of baking cake and pine from the Christmas tree.

Once the cakes were out of the oven, the final step was pouring the rum. Rum was used to moisten and to preserve the cake. There's nothing so delicious and evocative of Christmas for me as a well-made black cake.

Here is a similar recipe. Ingredients:

Macerated fruit

* 1 lb. prunes, pitted
* 1 lb. currants
* 1 lb. raisins
* 8 oz. red glaced cherries
* 4 oz. mixed peel

Soaking

* 750 ml. bottle port wine (or another dark red wine)
* 3-4 cups white or dark rum

Browning

* 4 tbsp. brown sugar
* 4 tbsp. port wine

Cake batter

* 1 lb. unsalted butter, softened (4 sticks)
* 1 lb. sugar, demerara brown or white granulated (2 cups)
* 12 eggs
* Zest of one lemon
* Zest of one orange
* 1 tsp. vanilla extract
* 1 tsp. almond extract
* 2 tsp. mixed essence
* 1½ lb. macerated fruit mixture (about 3 heaping cups)
* 300 gm. all-purpose flour (2½ level cups)
* 2 tsp. baking powder
* 1½ tsp. ground cinnamon
* ½ tsp. ground nutmeg
* ¼ tsp. ground all spice
* ¼ tsp. ground clove

Mixture for topping:

* ¼ cup dark rum
* ¼ cup cherry brandy

Instructions

Fruit: Wash and dry all fruits. Mix together in a large bowl. Place fruits a little at a time in a blender. Add enough wine to grind fruits to a paste. Repeat process until macerated. Add 3-4 cups dark rum. Stir and let mixture soak at minimum one week or even one year+, adding more wine or rum periodically.

Browning: If using store-bought burnt sugar, skip this step. Place sugar in a small saucepan. On low heat, turn sugar with a spoon until it begins to caramelize. Once dark brown, add wine and remove from heat. Let cool completely.

Make batter

* Preheat oven to 275 or 300 degrees F.
* Line 3 8-inch or 2 9-inch baking pans with parchment paper. Trim paper and set aside.
* Bring eggs and butter to room temperature.
* Crack eggs into a separate bowl one at a time. Beat in zests, vanilla, almond, and mixed essence. Set aside.
* In a separate bowl, mix all dry ingredients. Set aside.
* In deep mixing bowl, cream butter and sugar until pale. Add eggs a little at a time. Blend well.
* Of the macerated fruit mixture, add 1½ lb. (3 heaping cups) a little at a time, continue blending.
* Add flour mixture a little at a time – fold in with a spatula.
* Add 1 tbsp. burnt sugar at a time until desired color is achieved. If using store-bought burnt sugar, 4 tbsp. should suffice for a very dark cake. Mix well.
* Pour batter into lined cake pans.
* Bake anywhere from 275-300 degrees F for 80-90 minutes. When cake comes out of oven, pour alcohol mixture on top. When cool, cover cake with plastic wrap. Flavor is best after a few days.

## \*\*\* Taking the Train from Washington to Ohio by Tim Downie

I am new to vision loss. I had to abruptly stop work in March 2021. I no longer have a driver’s license or car, and figuring out how to do the activities of daily life poses a challenge. How to get groceries, do banking, get to the doctor, go anywhere. In Snohomish County, I was approved for DART paratransit. But I soon found DART meant rarely getting anywhere on time, and a 15-minute trip could take hours. Today, I use DART, but also use Lyft, and if I have a companion, will use a bus.

Soon after joining Washington Council of the Blind, I started calling in to the Saturday morning Coffee and Conversation. It was there I heard Jim and Holly Turri, both blind, talk about a vacation they took to Space Camp.

What? Travel as a blind person? How is that possible? Daily living was hard enough.

I started asking questions. Flying is also problematic for me, as I have real problems with eye pressure, and although I take eye drops, a long, pressurized, cross-country flight isn’t something I should be trying. I then heard about Amtrak.

I was told if you tell Amtrak about your visual impairment, they will flag your ticket as a red star passenger and take good care of you.

I live in Washington, and wanted to visit my mom in Cleveland, OH. As I struggle with things online, I called Amtrak and booked a ticket, and shared my vision issues and that I was in the process of having both hips replaced. I booked an accessible sleeper car cross-country. Amtrak gives a discount for those with a documented disability.

What was it like? It was absolutely amazing. The Amtrak staff helped me get to the right area to board my car. The accessible sleeper room was incredible. It has two bunks, an upper and lower. The staff converted the bunks into two comfy chairs and table in the day, and into bunks with bedding at night. The accessible sleeper room also has its own sink and toilet. You can choose whether to dine in the dining car or have meals brought to your room. I did some of both, depending on how well I was feeling on a given day.

When I did go to the dining car, I loved it. They seated me with people since space is at a premium. I had some wonderful conversations, and on one leg of the journey, they unknowingly seated me with another blind passenger. That was fun, but I really enjoyed all the people I met. There definitely were several meals I took in my room, due to disabling eye headaches I get, or my hips bothering me. So, the flexibility was nice.

Amtrak does stop to load and unload, and you can get out and stretch. That was great, and often the people I’d eaten with would see me and my white cane and call out to me to chat. It felt like I had many people watching out for me.

I had one layover in Chicago, an absolutely amazing station. I was picked up in a little shuttle and taken to the lounge where there were free snacks, coffee, and sodas, while I waited for my next train. I felt very safe and comfortable.

Sadly, my final destination stop was horrible. Elyria, OH, is a stop, but not a station – just a concrete platform in a rough part of town. And the train goes there at 2 a.m. The Amtrak people asked if someone was meeting me. My sister and brother-in-law were in the car waiting for me, thank goodness. They told me there were people doing drug deals and sleeping on the platform. No thank you, Elyria. I won’t use that platform again.

I had a great visit with my mom in Lorain, OH. Because Elyria was so bad, I changed my departure to Cleveland, where there was an actual train station. I booked a hotel about a 10-minute walk away, but three different hotel clerks told me not to walk it, that I was a huge target with my cane, and there were frequent muggings in that area. Growing up in Cleveland, I know there are very real dangers, so I listened. I took Lyft from the hotel to the station. The station is behind a chain-link fence, close to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, but in the middle of a sketchy field. Inside the station was OK, and there were several Amish families in the station house. Many Amish families in the Ohio and Pennsylvania area take Amtrak.

My trip back was calm, with one exception. A cargo train had derailed, blocking part of the tracks. So, Amtrak had us board chartered buses to get us to the next stop and board our next waiting train. I got confused walking to the buses, but an Amtrak employee saw me and let me put my hand on her shoulder to guide me to the bus. They helped me get to the right train car with my luggage.

I will definitely take Amtrak again. I felt safe, except for Elyria and Cleveland, but that is a problem with my home town, not Amtrak. The Amtrak train was fun, comfortable, and relaxing, and the staff were super helpful. With very limited vision and disability, I am vulnerable, but I never felt that way on Amtrak. Honestly, I’ve had more troubling transportation issues just in my hometown trying to make it to doctor appointments sometimes. If you are thinking of taking Amtrak and have questions, I’d be glad to chat. I’m looking forward to the next time I can take Amtrak somewhere. It’s a great option to have.

## \*\*\* An Autumniphile’s Take on Becoming Blind, and Autumn by Charlie Marsh

Fall has always been my favorite season. Born sighted in the middle of summer, autumn was my first experience of the changing seasons. Perhaps for this reason, I love this season. I wait for the change in direction of the winds, cooler temps at night and, eventually, the change in colors. As a child, wide-eyed, I memorized volumes of the sights of the changing of leaves. These days, I am grateful for that because I am going blind, and the details of the changing leaves are becoming muted. But I still have a wealth of memories to choose from and replay them in my mind.

One thing I have noticed is during the visually-sighted days, I was so busy focusing on what I could see. It made fall one dimensional. However, losing my vision was a ticket to the many other ways I could explore fall. I now experience fall via all my senses.

For instance, the smell of cinnamon and pumpkin spice fills my nostrils like everyone else … but I now experience the finer aromas of fall, ones no one talks about. The smell of all the fruits and vegetables about to be harvested pick up in early fall. I can smell the apples ripening on trees, next are peaches and, later, grapes and pumpkins. Every month of fall has its own set of fruit and vegetables. These are the smells of harvest. Then there are the wet leaves turning to mulch, an entirely pleasant smell to me, though others complain about the smell. As the leaves are close to falling completely on the ground, the smells of coniferous trees become stronger. Fall has its own bouquet that I never noticed when I was so completely focused on sight.

Then there are the sounds of fall. I have always enjoyed the sound of crunching leaves as I walked, but those sounds are heightened as I have begun going blind, so much that I pause and smile in delight when it happens. I may not be able to see all the details, but memories fill my mind, and I create my own images from my memory. Though I know these are memories, they still give me great joy.

I can also hear the wind more, and when the winds start coming more from the north, I know cooler temps are coming. There are also the sounds of early fall. The lawnmowers coming out for final lawn mowing. People are out and about in the neighborhood more, now that cooler temperatures have returned, and I can hear laughter and people talking as they put up their fall decorations.

Pumpkin spice is everywhere, as usual, but other tastes have become more refined. There is a taste on the wind. It literally has a drier, mustier taste. Apples are sweeter in the fall, as they are the freshest, they will be all year long. Even fragranced candles have a special taste when they are scented with fall. And who can forget the cooler temps, winds, and rains that come here to Yakima, Washington? My skin craves these things as a body craves water.

Fall is a more delightful and rich feast now that I am losing my sight. This Autumniphile has found a way to enjoy the fall season more with the losing of my eyesight. It is a fuller, richer experience that I enjoy and delight in. Instead of enjoying one sensory dish, I can now feast.

## \*\*\* Celebrating the WCB Families Way by Hayley Agers

Last year, December 2022, was the first year the Washington Council of the Blind (WCB) Families Committee partnered with the Edmonds Lions Club to hold our first holiday celebration. Oh, what a good time we had. Now planning is underway again. Here’s a recap of last year’s highlights.

There were stories and music, and the best part was when we all gathered around the piano and sang. We even had a solo performance, on his guitar, by our own WCB youth attendee, Aden. There were drawings and goody bags for all to take home. The gifts included things like handmade wooden toys, stuffed animals, and Braille coloring books. Santa made a special appearance, and those who wanted to make their Christmas wishes known or pose for a photo with him were invited to do so. One parent even told me that this was his daughter’s first event with other blind children. It was nice to see her interacting and smiling, rather than sitting by their side, afraid to be excluded or unable to do what the sighted children were doing, which had been her previous experience.

Here is the craft we made. Many of the adult volunteers asked if there would be enough supplies for them to make one, too.

Holly Jolly Sock Snowman

* 1 adult-sized white tube sock
* 1 colored sock
* Uncooked rice
* 2 rubber bands
* 1 piece of colored ribbon to match hat or piece of fleece cut into a strip
* Small piece of twine or thread
* Something to make face; googly eyes, marker for drawing, orange fleece for nose, the choices are yours
* 3 black buttons
* Essential oils, optional

Instructions:

Over a bowl or tray to avoid a mess, fill up the sock with the dried rice. This will begin to form the body and head of your snowman. Play with it a little, and when you have filled it enough to make a decent-sized body and head, use a rubber band to secure it at the top. Using your hands to mold it, move the rice around until you have the size of body and head you wish, then use another rubber band to separate the two.

To make his hat, which will cover the raw end of the sock and may need to be cut down, cut the toe off of the colored sock. Slip one of the open ends of the colored sock over the snowman’s head, turning up the end to make a small cuff. Use a small piece of thread or string to tie the top of the sock, as it now looks more like a hat. You can use scissors to cut small vertical lines in the top part so it looks like a fringe or pom-pom.

Using a glue gun or Aileen’s Tacky Glue, attach three black buttons to the body of the snowman. Take a piece of coordinating ribbon or strip of fleece and tie a scarf around the neck.

For his face, you can choose to draw it on with Sharpies, glue on googly eyes or circles of construction paper. The same can be done for the nose and mouth. For our noses, we used miniature carrot pieces that I found at the craft store. They had a small dowel on the end that could be glued and poked through the fabric of the sock.

If you want to make your snowman scented and smell like Christmas, you could add 5 to 10 drops of an essential oil to the rice before you fill the sock.

## \*\*\* Christmases to Remember by Linda Wilder

I grew up in Yazoo City, MS, with a loving mother and father, many aunts uncles, and too many cousins to list. Our Christmas celebrations were filled with family and friends as far back as I can remember.

Our home was decorated from top to bottom and inside to outside. Our table was laden with so many delicious foods. Mom had all the traditional ham and turkey with cornbread dressing (remember, this is Southern-style cooking). We had all the typical vegetables and, of course, the ambrosia and jello Christmas tree molds with Mandarin oranges and whipping cream. I cannot forget the sweet potatoes with brown sugar and melted marshmallows on top. The real treat was the many pies, cakes, and candies mom baked. She usually made Southern pecan and minced meat pies. Her German chocolate and jam spice cakes were always a highlight. Oh, and I cannot forget the fudge, pralines, and my favorite, divinity. Mom always put red and green food coloring in the divinity.

I really miss all those Christmases. Mom and dad are gone, along with most of my aunts and uncles. We still have great Christmases, but no longer do we decorate so elaborately, nor do we cook so many unhealthy desserts. Since most of our grandsons and granddaughters are so particular, we give gift cards instead of the fancy, wrapped presents.

## \*\*\* Take My Hand, Let’s Stroll Together by Hayley Agers

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Welcome to my garden, take my hand and let me show you around. My goal always is that you leave feeling relaxed, cared for, and a little spoiled.

Let’s start where I begin each day, a small deck surrounded by wooden rails and window boxes filled with red begonias and white lobelia. Please take a seat at the table, and let me bring you a cup of tea. I’ll turn on the water feature that can be heard from anywhere on either deck. The wind chimes hang here, too, so let’s keep our fingers crossed that a delightful breeze will come along and give us some music. If the wind should not come, never fear, the speakers can play any music your heart desires. How have you been? Tell me what’s happening in your world, and as your friend, how can I support you?

Next, enjoy what’s blooming in the various pots on my larger deck. Did you smell that? Those are the two big pots of cherry tomatoes. There’s not much that matches the taste of a freshly plucked cherry tomato. No need to rinse, just pop it in your mouth and enjoy. And for that caprese salad I’ll be making us for lunch, the basil plant is just to your left. Further along, lettuce and various herbs grow in a raised planter. Pick a leaf or two and enjoy, but save room for lunch. It’s not a long walk to the other end of the deck, where the intoxicating jasmine winds up the trellis. Sit at the bistro table and I’ll be right out with that homemade scone and rose jam, made from the fragrant roses that grow at either end of this deck. Watch out, duck! That was a hummingbird on her way to the four feeders that hang from the eves of the covered area, and they sometimes get a little close.

Let’s keep moving, through the gate and down the wooden stairs to the garden below. Yes, that is a hot tub, and don’t worry, we’ll enjoy a dip later to soothe any achy muscles or mental fatigue.

On your left, you’ll be passing the fire pit, made of large paving slabs. Later, we can meet down here and enjoy some s’mores. If you caught a whiff of something sweet, that’s the wisteria tree that blooms right behind the fire pit. I’ll be sure to have one of the oh-so-comfy Adirondack chairs cleaned up and waiting for you upon your return. Be careful, we have a few more stairs before we reach the grass, but I’ve got you. On the right, is our tri-level terrace, and although we enjoy many seasonal fruits from this area, it’s a little difficult to walk around in. When they are ready, I’ll have you back and we’ll enjoy some fresh blueberries in my sheet-pan pancakes, or spread some homemade fig jam with our cheese and crackers in the evening. You might also like to reach down to your right and pluck a leaf from the lemon balm plant, rub it between your fingers, and smell its wonderful fragrance. At the bottom level of the terrace, we’ll reach the vegetable garden nestled in the corner. Just a few raised beds that are filled with zucchini, cucumbers, bell peppers, and jalapenos in one, and edible flowers like chives, day lilies, nasturtiums in the other.

The two large pots that you may notice as we walk by are filled with rosemary, the biggest I’ve ever seen. The other pot is filled with a variety of thornless raspberries. They aren’t quite ready yet, but I’ll be sure to get you some when they are.

The back fence of the garden is a work in progress, but right now it contains a climbing rose that I planted in memory of one of the babies I lost. There are also pink and red peonies from my friend Marilyn’s garden. When she passed away, and her daughter asked me if I would like something of her Mum’s, I picked these peonies and went over and dug them up. If you’ve never smelled a peony, please take a moment to bend down, being careful of the cages that hold them upright. What do you think?

Okay, now for the fun. Want to feel like a kid again? We’re about to cross over the iron bridge that will put you at the door of our two-story tree house. It was only one story when we moved in, and you had to use a rope ladder to get in and a fireman’s pole to get out. We made a few adjustments to make it easier, for the kids, of course. That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it.

As we enter the first floor, you’ll need to duck a little, as it’s a low ceiling. This isn’t ever a problem because on this floor, you’ll find the library with bookshelves filled with books and games, and some beanbags and comfy stools to sit on.

In the back left corner, you will find the wooden stairs to take you up to the second floor. Up here, there’s a couch that folds out into a bed for all of the nights Sydney has sleepovers with friends. When friends can’t come, she convinces me to join her. The inside walls are painted white in order to shine the movie projector onto the walls and watch a movie. Most recently, it was Little Women. On any given weekend in the summer, you’ll hear giggling teen girls laughing at a movie or one another’s stories. There is a high ceiling with a chandelier. Around the room are accent tables and drawers displaying and hiding all sorts of goodies. If the idea of a pull-out futon bed doesn’t sound appealing to you, climb into one of the two hammocks, but warn the person below you when you’ll be rolling out.

Would you prefer to leave via the stairs, the fireman’s pole or, just past the couch, you can climb out of the window into a spiral slide and make your exit. If you choose the slide, laying down makes it faster, and you won’t hit your head. Come on friend, you can do it, screaming with delight permitted. As we move back over the iron bridge, you will feel a pool on your left that isn’t quite ready yet, unless you buy into the benefits of ice baths.

I have one special place left to show you. I fondly refer to it as the Kindness Zone. It’s the most recent addition to our garden, and it’s my new favorite place to be. This area can be accessed from the main garden, but I like to enter through the gate at the front of the house. So, hold my hand, we’re going to climb the stairs and head back inside, so we can enter from the way you’ll experience the most beauty – through the garden gate. Before we do, we have to pass by the roses, lavender, and rose lilies that smell so fragrant when in bloom. Reach your hand down, feel those tall stems? That’s the lavender. Go ahead and pick one of those blooms off and rub it between the palm of your hands. Let’s really set the mood for this relaxing space. Later I’ll bring you out a glass of lavender lemonade and you can enjoy that, too. We’re about to walk under the arbor, and you may feel a flower brush against your cheek. It’s okay. The arbor is filled with climbing honeysuckle and clematis. If you sniff, you will delight in the sweetness of the honeysuckle as we pass by. This is a small area, but packs a punch with what it has to offer in the way of calm, comfort, and fulfilling moments with loved ones. The area is covered by a four-post gazebo and roof, and the cement floor is covered with a round rug in shades of blue and grey. If you want to take your shoes off, feel free. In the middle of the rug is a round table surrounded by curved couches with cushions. They wrap right around the shape of the table and are so comfortable to either sit or lay down on. The water fountain adds a soothing ambiance to the space, kind of like sitting by a running stream. There are also fragrant flowers in this part of my garden – would you expect any less? Two more roses planted in remembrance of two more heavenly babies, some lavender, flocks, lilies, and some herbs.

This evening, when the sun goes down and it’s not so hot, we’ll venture back out here if you’d like. I’ll put on the fire in the middle of the round table, we can partake in a beverage of your choice, and if it helps you to have a little light on, I’ll be sure to have the lights that surround the roof covering turned on.

I designed this specific place to be an area of reflection, a place people could retreat to when needing to gather their thoughts, pray, read in silence, or just relax and listen to the sounds of nature. It’s very special to me and where I will spend most of my summer. I just added the newest addition to the space, and it’s in loving memory of my Farley, my guide dog who just passed away in May. It’s a garden statue of a black lab, and it brings me comfort to know he’s here with me in spirit, even if he isn’t in body. I hope you’ve enjoyed the tour of my garden, and that the yummy treats I shared along the way have left you feeling like your cup and your belly are full. I encourage each of you reading this to find some time to create those special moments with loved ones, enjoy what is around you, and most importantly, to have a space in your home or garden that allows you to get away and take care of you. Please come back anytime, it’s been lovely having you.

## \*\*\* Walking Through Fall by Chris Coulter

Fall is in the air. We didn’t know it would come so fast. Actually, I like fall. It begins with the sweet and gentle sunshine that isn’t too hot or too cold. It’s just right.

Fall begins with beauty and with the falling leaves as they float down to cover the earth. Then, the nights become cold and crisp. After that, the rain and snow come calling.

We move into Christmas time, with its carols and bells, with gatherings of people and parties.

The New Year comes in with loud voices and starts the traditional fireworks on New Year’s Eve. Everyone raises their voices, as fireworks light up the sky, and people keep going up into a crescendo of fire and sound and shouts of “Happy New Year!”

Then, after midnight, as the night becomes quiet, we begin to reflect calmly and thoughtfully about the year we’ve just lived through and the hope that we want to see in the future. This last reflection on the year tends toward conversations that will lead us into whatever the future holds.

## \*\*\* **The Mask That Few See** by Sarah Edick

I don’t celebrate Halloween. However, last Oct. 31 was an interesting day. From that day on, I have celebrated a good night of sleep. Here’s how it started.

A cold nose woke me up one night earlier last year. When I awoke, I was gasping for air. I told this to my sleep doctor, which prompted him to order an in-patient sleep study. Yes, I have sleep apnea. It’s not bad, but enough to need a machine. Off I went on the 31st to get my machine. I can change the settings with the help of Aira, a visual interpretation service for visually impaired and blind users that provides information about their environment.

Here’s the funny part. I came home with masks. However, they’re masks that nobody will see, except the kitty who woke me up that night and, of course, my caregiver.

Few friends will see the mask that I wear, and I don’t just wear it one night per year. I wear it every night. It’s a pain, dragging the machine, distilled water, and all of that, with me wherever I go. However, I’ve never felt better. In high school, they told us how important sleep is, and they were right. I’m functioning a whole lot better. I have a life, and due to my ability to get a good night’s sleep, I can do things that were impossible even 10 years ago.

I do have other sleep disorders that are being treated. So, look out Washington Council of the Blind, Sarah has energy, strength, and I have to say, I haven’t felt this wonderful in years. Why? Because, I wear a mask that few will ever see. It’s not frightening. It’s just part of my life now, where I feel almost normal.

I do celebrate traditional Thanksgiving and Christmas. It’s nice to celebrate Thanksgiving with something new to be thankful for.

When something such as sleep is a struggle and a challenge, the change is something to celebrate. Know that I celebrate the end of October for a wonderful reason. For me, it’s been a new beginning. The struggle is over.

To all of you, sweet dreams.

From Sarah, the kitty, and my new mask. The new one will come at the end of October. Again, I’ll celebrate sleep!

## \*\*\* Not So Jolly Holiday Musings by Allen Biné

I can't help myself. Each holiday season I just have to write at least one poem or essay expressing my feelings on a timely topic such as Christmas excesses, mall mania, or the virtues of fruitcake. This writing helps me keep what's left of my sanity during a time that's always difficult for me. Please accept the following in the spirit of fun I intended.

**Weary Christmas**  
by Allen Biné

Call me Scrooge if you want,

that name's OK with me,

but when I die don't lay me down

beneath a Christmas tree.

It isn't that I don't believe

in Rudolph and such stuff,

it's just that I can hardly stand

a month of jolly fluff.

Christmas music's everywhere

no matter where I go,

even in public restrooms,

it's piped in fast and slow.

When I come home for dinner

and sit before the set,

Charlie Brown's Christmas special

is the only thing I get.

No dinner's on the table,

the floor could use a mop,

we have to eat at Dick's again,

no time to cook, just shop.

Nordstrom may be happy,

ringing in the cash,

but not my feet that trudge the mall,

they're sore and have a rash.

Peace on earth, goodwill to all,

I'm for them too, you bet,

I just wish our season's greetings

didn't add more to our debt.

I guess I need to mellow out,

to join in all the fun,

even Scrooge came 'round at last,

that miserly son-of-a-gun.

So here's my gift, these words that rhyme,

I didn't have to wrap,

Weary Christmas everyone,

I'm tired and need a nap.

## \*\*\* **Holiday PJ’s** by Hayley Agers

For as long as I can remember, my mum has always gotten us two things at Christmas that we could be guaranteed: a new ornament for the tree and a new pair of Christmas PJ’s. “How many pairs of PJs can one have?” you might ask. Never enough in my opinion.

The style and patterns of PJ’s have varied, from elf-striped bottoms with an elf hat included, to a simple holiday plaid fleece.

It wasn’t until this last year, Christmas 2022, that I realized just how much of a staple these PJ’s and this tradition would mean, and how it would be the thing that pulled our family together through some difficult times.

We decided, since we hadn’t spent the holidays with my mother-in-law in quite a while, we would fly to California for Christmas 2022. The children were not so sure this was a good idea and reminded us daily of all the things they’d be missing at home, all of the traditional things that our family does. In order to make it a bit more memorable for them, I convinced David that we should buy matching holiday PJs. And, boy, were they cute – dark green fleece bottoms covered in white snowflakes and a matching green cotton long-sleeve top. I even got matching fleece bandanas for Aspen and Farley. We arrived in California around Dec. 17, with a flight returning home on Dec. 23 so we could get home for Christmas Eve and wake up in our own beds on Christmas morning. The entire trip had some challenges, including all of us getting COVID while there, but it wasn’t until our flight was cancelled because of bad winter weather here in Washington, that the holiday spirit felt like it had been zapped right out of our grasp.

We spent the next day trying to find flights home, only to discover that unless we wanted our two-hour trip home to be an entire day’s event, it wasn’t going to happen. Not only did we have to figure out what to do with our dogs at home, hoping the kennels could keep them a few more days, we had to figure out what Christmas Eve and day would look like for us.

On Christmas Eve, after attending a lovely service at a local church, we decided that we’d pack our things and find a hotel for the next few days. We were all tired, feeling a little bah humbug, and we just wanted to go home. But as soon as we walked into the lobby of the hotel and saw their massive hot chocolate bar, we instantly knew what to do.

We all went to our room, put on our matching PJ’s, went back down to the lobby to prepare a cup of hot chocolate, and then back to our room to watch “Home Alone” in our beds. The comments, from hotel staff and guests alike, made the whole experience even better. We could tell others who were stranded were feeling discouraged, too, and bringing a smile to their faces made our night. Despite the holidays not looking like we had planned, we learned a valuable lesson that night. Be flexible because something wonderful might be waiting right around the corner, and truly as long as we were together, that was what really mattered. This will go down as one of our favorite Christmas memories.

**A giant thank you**

to the 2023 Newsline committee for all of your creative ideas, diligent efforts, and contributions that help make Newsline great.

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