

Columns

Obscure holidays extend the fun of celebrating

The continuing saga of my love/hate relationship with streaming TV took a back seat during the holidays, but one good thing came out of frustration over not finding much of interest to watch; I found the "House" series and really enjoyed binge watching it.

Then I discovered one of our very favorite series, "Hell on Wheels" and was really enjoying the drama of the old west until season two ended and I was informed that I would have to pay to watch the rest. I am sure you can imagine my irritation. I pondered buying the subscription but decided that I was not going to be goaded into temptation when the prime reason for having the streaming service was to save money.

I then discovered "Boston Legal," and even though I am enjoying the magnificent writing and acting I am worried that it, too, will announce after the end of each season that I have to buy a subscription. I am beginning to learn the gimmicks of "free" TV.

It has been a few years since I have invested my time in series watching. "Blue Bloods" seemed, to me, like it was just about the only good writing on today's TV. The amount of available movies on streaming TV is staggering but I was nev-

Memories and Musings

By Cheri Sims



er one to invest two hours of my valuable time, every night, to watch movies.

I guess I have attention span problems; I really prefer half hour shows and then on to something else. I am still procrastinating about purchasing the \$85 antenna in order to watch local channels. A friend bought a lesser priced one and is not happy with the results.

I guess the days of sitting down with the seed catalogues in January and February are gone. I did not receive one single catalogue this year and I really miss them. There was something special about sitting on the couch, bundled up in a warm comforter with a hot cup of tea or cocoa and flipping the pages to the delight of each new picture of spring flowers.

It is just not the same sitting at the computer and looking at the seed catalogue companies' web pages. The same holds true for reading the newspa-

per at breakfast, I just can't get into reading the news on my phone while eating. Mitten kites agrees; she has a real hard time getting comfy sitting on my phone as opposed to curling up on my newspaper.

I just completed my after Christmas bargain hunting at "Prairie Gardens" in Champaign; it is so much fun planning next year's dining room garland with new pieces purchased at 70% to 90% off the regular price.

I had a specific goal in mind and that was to, hopefully, purchase a couple of the beautiful Jacobean silk poinsettias I had seen on my pre-Christmas trip to see all the new decorations. This particular poinsettia design is one I have never seen at any of the Christmas shops in the last couple years of shopping.

Jacobean designs are usually found in crewel and needlepoint and date back to the 17th Century. It is hard to de-

scribe but it is basically old English floral design and I was introduced to Jacobean works of art when I managed "Charlotte's Web" in Charleston and the owner, Charlotte Baker, taught me how to needlepoint, crewel and weave. The poinsettia is a simple design of red and green floral on a white background and it just so happened to match a Jacobean Christmas pillow I recently found on sale at "Joann Fabrics" in Mattoon. These should make a lovely addition to my Christmas plans for next year and it has revived my interest in hand work.

Luckily I still have some unfinished pieces in the attic; they are 30 years old but I didn't have the heart to throw them away so I am just going to get busy and do some needlework. The canvases are still in very good shape and there is even a Jacobean flowerer which I could needlepoint in the Christmas colors. I also still have a big box of yarn and floss, so hopefully I will be able to find enough to complete the

piece. Charlotte would be happy to know I still have some of her pieces to finish.

If you are not tired of holidays or looking for something to celebrate in January, take a look at the website "Holiday's Calendar" at (<https://www.holidayscalendar.com/months/january/>). You will find such fun days to celebrate such as Jan. 21, which is National Squirrel Appreciation Day, Jan. 26 is National Peanut Butter Day, Jan. 28 is National Blueberry Pancake Day and Jan. 31 is National Hot Cocoa Day. There are hundreds of holidays throughout the year in which we can decorate and celebrate so no need for after holiday blues.

I can easily figure out how to celebrate squirrels; I could decorate their six-foot feeding station but I am not too sure how to decorate for celebrating pancakes or cocoa except just by eating them. I found the "Tasty" website and discovered a number of recipes for gourmet hot chocolate. Let the celebration begin.

Just think of all the possibilities this month!

Gourmet Hot Chocolate

Ingredients

for 4 servings

- 1 ½ cups whole milk
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons powdered sugar, or to taste
- ½ teaspoon espresso powder
- 8 oz 72% dark chocolate
- whipped cream, for serving

Preparation

In a 1.5-quart saucepan over medium heat, whisk together whole milk, heavy cream, powdered sugar, and espresso powder until hot.

Small bubbles will appear around the edges and the mixture may start to steam. Do not allow the mixture to boil.

Turn heat to low and stir in chopped chocolate until melted completely.

Serve warm, topped with whipped cream.

Enjoy! (<https://tasty.co/recipe/creamy-gourmet-hot-chocolate>)

Thinking the worst

Many times the subject of my column dwells on the goodness of people and how, for the most part, people act in a way that is kind and benevolent. I write about events that demonstrate the goodness of mankind because I am trying to convince myself. You see, since I was a kid, I generally thought the worst about things. For example, my mother would question me about the whereabouts of my little sister if she were late for supper and I would answer her by saying, "I don't know where she is, she probably got hit by a car." This pessimism continued into adulthood. Whenever I couldn't find my car in the parking lot of a shopping center, I would immediately assume it had been stolen, although in reality I had forgotten that I had parked my car several rows over from where I was looking.

This pessimism continues to the present as the following story illustrates:

The other day I went shopping at a grocery store looking for a particular brand of food coloring that my wife needed to make Christmas cookies with our granddaughters. I had taken a photo of the old, nearly empty box of food coloring because I wanted to make sure I purchased the correct ingredient (I have a bad reputation of going to the store and bringing home something entirely different from what my wife wanted). So, with my trusty cell phone in-hand, I walked down the store aisle where spices and baking material are located and compared boxes of food coloring with the photo on my cell phone. I find the correct box and toss the food coloring into the shopping cart and scurry to the self-checkout registers because my granddaughters are due to arrive at my house soon.

As I leave the store, I slam the shopping cart back into a line of other shopping carts and head out into the parking

So there I was

By Pete Buckley



lot, hoping no one stole my car. I find my car (I actually remember where I parked it this time), open the door, throw the grocery bag onto the front seat and reach into my pocket for my cell phone so I can tell my wife when to expect me home. Only my phone wasn't in my pocket. In fact, it wasn't anywhere in my car.

In my mind, I quickly retraced my steps in the store and suddenly realize that I had left my phone in the cup holder in the shopping cart. I race back into the store and search the line of carts linked together and reach the conclusion that someone had taken my shopping cart because it was the last one in line and the obvious choice for someone to take when entering the store.

I had already destroyed my cell phone (and learned not to swim with my phone in my swim trunks) several months ago and I did not want to go through the trouble of getting a new phone again. I ran throughout the store accusing customer-after-customer asking, "Have you seen a cell phone in your shopping cart that some idiot left in the cup holder?" Every customer I approached in this rather large store had not seen my cell phone. Being the pessimist I am, I am think to myself, "Someone found my iPhone and decided to steal it."

I went to Customer Service and asked if anyone turned it in with no luck. I tried to think logically for a change and decided that every shopper must leave through the exit door, so I positioned myself near this door and quizzed every

departing customer with no success. Every customer was sympathetic to my plight and several customers told me of their own personal stories of losing their cell phone.

One nice lady offered to let me use her phone to call my wife. At first my wife tried calling my phone to see if anyone would answer, but since I knew that I had silenced my phone, I doubted this would work and although my wife attempted to call multiple times, no one picked up.

By this time, I had monopolized this lady's phone for a considerable length of time, yet she never told me to hurry or suggest that she had to leave before her ice cream melted. My wife noted that we have "Find My" app on our cell phones and she searched and saw that my phone was still in the store.

My son, who by this time, had arrived at my house with my granddaughters, suggested my wife activate "iPhone alert" on the Find My app. This emits a loud bell-like noise that is heard even though your phone may be on silent. Several minutes later, I checked with Customer Service and they informed me that a woman had just turned in my phone after hearing a beeping sound coming from her cup holder.

To say I was relieved is an understatement. Once again my pessimistic thoughts were uncalled for and the goodness of people came through as they usually do. Will I ever learn? (doubtful). After claiming my iPhone and walking back to my car, I discovered it was stolen... (not).

Star-like planets are 'wanderers'

The planets all appear star-like to our eyes but, unlike stars, they appear to change their positions in the sky from night to night. This is why the ancients called them "the wanderers" which is where we derive the name "planet."

Venus has slowly been getting higher in our evening sky, appearing to approach Saturn. Sunday evening, look low in the southwest at 5:30 p.m. Venus will be quite bright but can you see Saturn near it? Look a bit to the right of Venus and binoculars will help. At 0.4 degrees apart, this

In the night sky

By David Leake



is the closest two easily-visible planets will appear together for all of 2023.

A thin waxing crescent Moon will be below the pair this evening. Later in the week watch the two planets separate with Saturn getting lower

and Venus higher compared to the horizon.

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The vapor of life

It was so loud it drew the attention of everyone in the room, including the sleeping dog lying next to me. Maybe you heard it too, if you were watching the Bills and Bengals game that night. It was a sudden, deafening hush that fell upon the crowd of thousands as a young man dropped to the ground and life left his body before all of our eyes. Status quo, small talk, rivalry, agenda, ego, and selfishness faded away like smoke as life got real, really fast.

The young man, a Buffalo Bills football player named Damar Hamlin, had stood up after a tackle, taken a step backwards, then hit the ground with no heartbeat. Then the hush, the gasp, the holding of the breath while medical staff stormed the field and did their work.

My husband and I prayed while watching the chaos on the field. The announcers of the game were clearly shaken and distraught, struggling for words to say that were uncommon in this strange situation where feelings took over. Second by second we waited for word that Damar was breathing, that a heartbeat was again in his body, that things were OK.

It was messy and uncomfortable and out of everyone's control. It was really real, and beyond what any of us could fix with all the college degrees in the world, or the money, or the status, or the fame and

popularity, the only thing that could help Damar at that moment was an ever-loving and all-powerful God. Somehow we all knew that, so we prayed.

Fans in the stands prayed. Damar's teammates prayed. The Cincinnati Bengals, (the rival team that night) joined the Buffalo Bills on the field and prayed. Newscasters prayed. All week long, calls to prayer blanketed social media and updates on Damar's condition was at the top of the news on every channel. He was America's boy who we all loved and cared about.

My heart was so warm and comforted when I finally heard that he was on the road to recovery and home with his family. Prayer works. Yes, he had the right people working on him at the right time, but that doesn't always save people's lives. People prayed, millions of people, and God moved.

Doesn't it feel good to come together in one mind and purpose before God and see the prayers answered?! I know that if we could pray like this for other things, those prayers

too, could be answered.

2 Chronicles 7:14. If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

I sincerely hope that we do not quickly go back to the way things were; I want to linger in this togetherness of spirit and empathy. I want to continue to pray en masse for others who need God's touch in a mighty way. I want to see more miracles and moves of God. And I want to see the world stay turned to God the way they did that Monday night when they realized how fragile life really is, and who is the giver of life.

Life is just a vapor, here today and gone tomorrow. If we wait until tragedy strikes to call out to God, do we really know Him? God never intended to be just a parachute to grab when our plane is going down; He wants to be the pilot that we trust to fly our life. So talk to Him. He would love that.