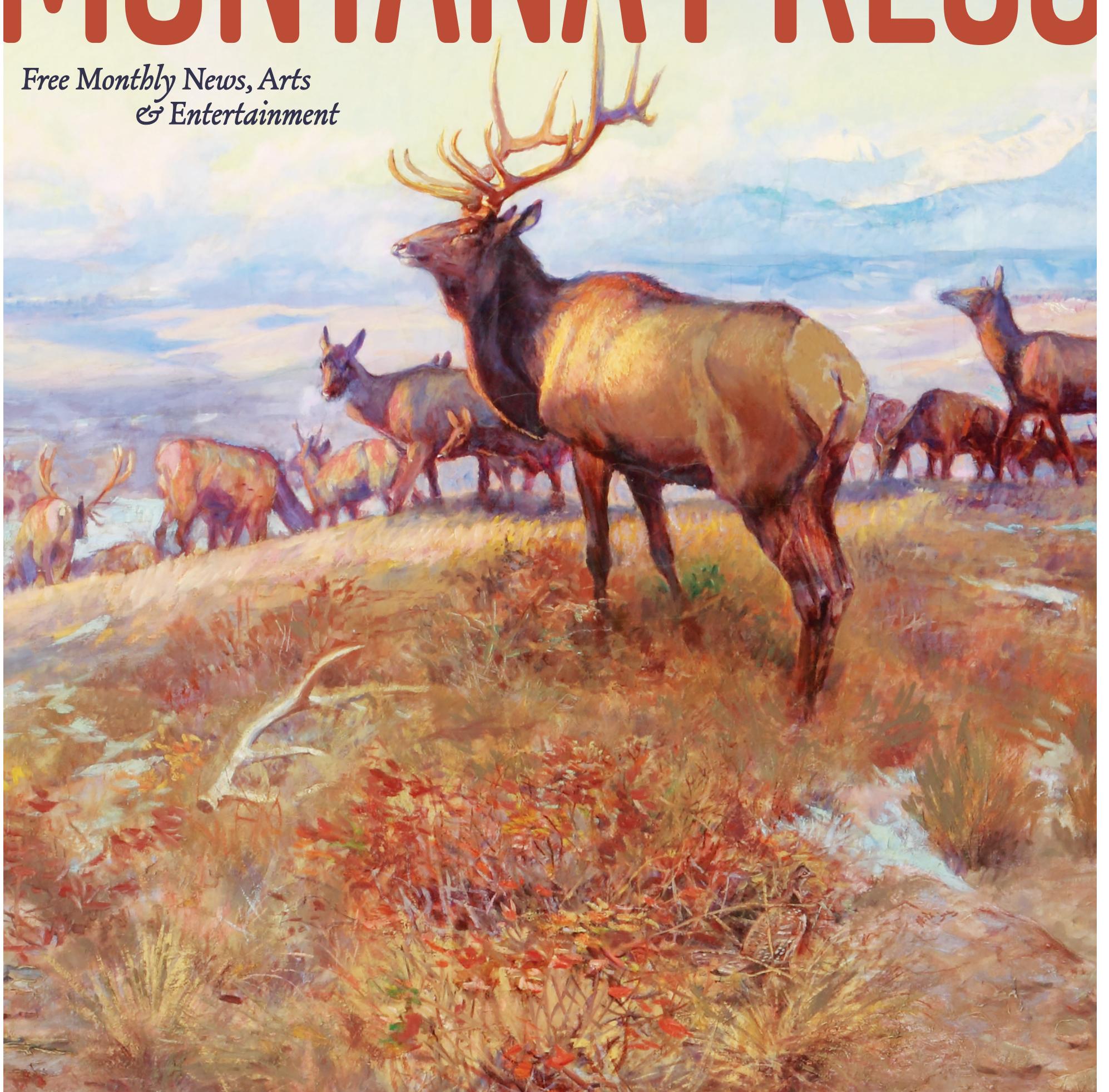


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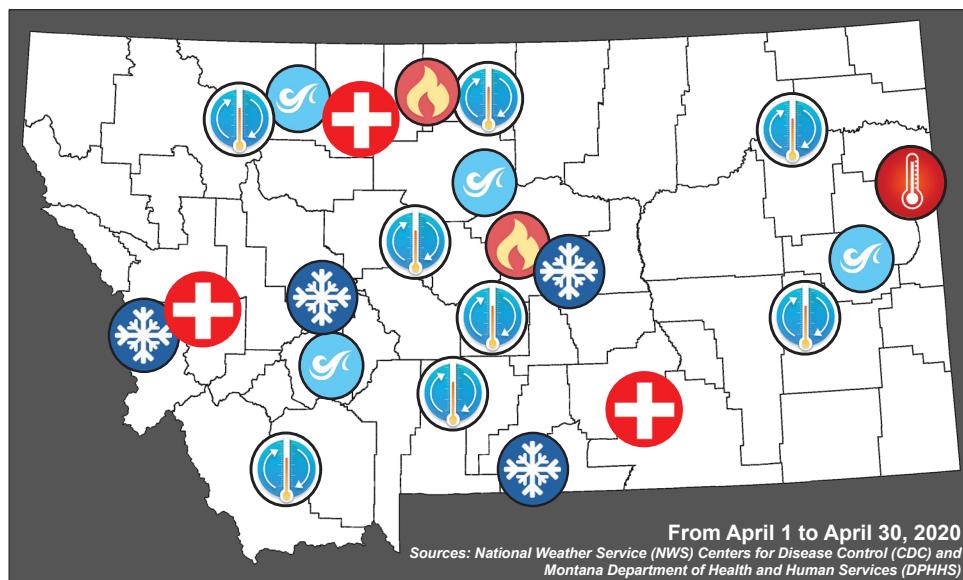
MONTANA PRESS

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MONTANA ALMANAC



Temperatures Across the State

Highs from 60 to 70 degrees and lows in the single digits were recorded during the month across the state. A low temperature of -14 degrees at Rocky Boy was the lowest temperature recorded in the entire contiguous U.S. on April 2. On April 3, Miles City temperatures fell to 2 degrees, breaking a record of 4 degrees on that date in 2014. A record-breaking low of -3 degrees was measured in Great Falls (7 degrees in 1997) on April 12 along with a record low of 1 degree in Cut Bank (3 degrees in 1997) and 10 degrees in Dillon (12 degrees in 1975). Montana carried the record low again for the contiguous U.S. on April 12 with a low of -7 at Bynum and again on April 16 with a low of -1 recorded 13 miles northeast of White Sulphur Springs. On April 13, Glasgow set a local record for a cold temperature at 11 degrees (13 degrees in 2014). April 2020 was the coldest April on record for Glasgow. On April 17, Livingston also set a record with a low of 15 degrees (16 degrees in 1964). The recorded high for the period was 80 degrees at Sidney on April 21.

Peak Wind Gusts

High winds swept across the state early in April with gusts upwards of 40 and 50 mph across north-central Montana. Peak wind gusts of 68 mph were measured at East Glacier on April 7, as well as peak gusts of 62 mph at Fort Benton on the same day. On April 27, high winds were recorded at peak gusts of 72 mph at East Glacier and 60 mph at Townsend. On April 27, a peak wind gust of 80 mph was recorded at the Beaver Hill Department of Transportation site on the Dawson/Wibaux county line.

Precipitation and Snowfall

An early spring storm dumped inches of snow across the state starting on April 1. Lewistown recorded 10.5" of snow and nearby Hilger measured 12". Grass Range recorded 9" and Gallatin Gateway noted 7". Luther in Carbon county recorded 21" by April 2. Another spring snow storm hit Montana on the weekend of April 10, causing low visibility, cold temperatures, gusty winds and heavy snowfall in some areas. Dupuyer Creek in Teton county measured 15" of snowfall, Daisy Peak in Meagher county measured 15", Judith Basin recorded 12" and Pike Creek in Glacier County measured 9". A spotter from the South Hills of Helena reported 15" of fresh snow with the storm. The highest snowfall totals from the storm were 17" from a station seven miles southwest of Helena. On April 11, Missoula broke records for liquid precipitation at .62" (record of .34" in 1996) and snowfall at 1.2" (1" in 1971). On April 15, Missoula broke another snowfall record with 2.1" (1.4" in 1960). On April 16, other snowfall totals in the state topped 18" at Red Lodge and 11" at Nye in Sweet Grass county.

Early Fire Danger Warnings

A combination of strong winds and low relative humidity created near-critical fire weather conditions on April 26 across parts of north-central, central, southwest and northeast Montana. As fire danger increases during the season, individuals are urged to check local conditions if planning a burn, have water ready, and consider another day if the danger is high. Critical fire weather conditions continued through the end of April in Blaine county, including Fort Belknap and parts of Fergus County. In these conditions, any spark, man-made or nature-caused, may cause new fire starts. Check the website at www.firerestrictions.us/mt/ for more information.

Continuing COVID-19 Health Emergency

The Governor's stay-at-home order was somewhat relaxed on April 27 when businesses such as salons and retail establishments were able to reopen with restrictions. The governor's office, in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control, urges all residents to wear non-medical masks when visiting any establishment where six feet or more of personal distancing is not possible. Although the state also gave the go-ahead for schools to reopen, school districts and universities largely decided to continue online learning programs through the end of the school year. Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks continue to be closed to the public and all travelers entering Montana are required to self-quarantine (not leave their dwelling) for 14 days upon arrival. The National Guard is working to spread awareness of the quarantine requirement by informing travelers and checking temperatures at ports of entry such as train stations and airports. Highway road signs also display this information. As the virus continues to spread, The U.S. topped one million infected cases and 61,000 related deaths. Montana reported 16 deaths by the end of the month, most in remote Toole County (6), with the highest number of reported cases in Gallatin County/Bozeman (146) and Yellowstone County/Billings (80), and a total number of 451 cases in the state reported on April 30. Approximately 13,500 individuals in the state have been tested for the virus as of this date.

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43

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A look at the iconic artwork of Charles M. Russell from inside the C.M. Russell Museum in Great Falls.

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Romance and suspense novelist Danica Winters turns real life into page-turning adventure.

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ON THE COVER "The Exalted Ruler" oil painting by C.M. Russell from the permanent collection at the C.M. Russell Museum in Great Falls, For more about the painting, see page 13.

MONTANA PRESS MONTHLY

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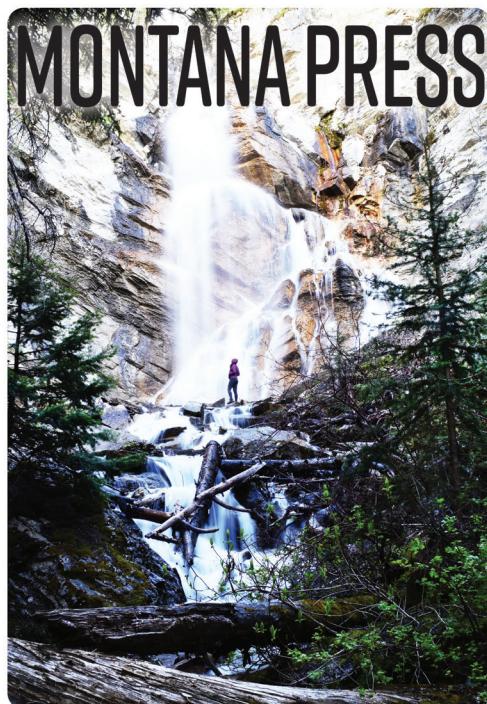
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2019 Grand Prize winner (above) Sara Schroeder: Runners-up Eddie Bringenberg (below) and Eric Henderson (at left).

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MISSOULA IN QUARANTINE

Images of Missoula in lockdown. (Above) Central Park Structure, the parking garage on Main Street has no cars parked inside. (At left) A sign hanging in the retail shop Aporta in downtown Missoula says it all. The business that carries textiles, accessories, art and more is temporarily closed. (Below) The Roxy Theater on Higgins Ave. is temporarily closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. It's a historic nonprofit venue that shows independent, foreign and classic films. As the Montana economy begins to re-open starting April 26, movie theaters are to remain closed. Photos by Geneva Zoltek.



MONTANA VOICE

Nation and State Wrestle with “Re-opening”

Montana, like the rest of the states, is wrestling with the difficult and complex measures needed to “re-open” shuttered portions of the economy. But doing so means weighing the very real danger that we are nowhere near having coronavirus under control as life and death hang in the precarious balance of the decisions. One thing, however, seems inarguably evident – don’t, under any circumstances take medical advice from Donald Trump!

Trump pulled one of the greatest gaffes in presidential history by suggesting that if people got disinfectants and light inside their bodies they could knock out the coronavirus “in one minute.” In the background Dr. Deborah Birx, one of the medical advisors during the so-called “briefings,” contorted in horror at what the president was suggesting. As a result, hundreds of people have called the poison hotlines of states about “injecting disinfectants” on the advice of this most unhinged president in modern times. Both the FDA and the makers of Lysol have issued warnings against ingesting or injecting any disinfectants.

Of course it’s not hard to figure out why Trump is willing to put 330 million Americans at risk to re-open the economy—it’s the horse he was planning on riding to re-election, but he’s been unsaddled and the horse is headed to the glue factory. Despite praising himself more than 600 times during what were supposed to be updates on the coronavirus, he’s falling in the polls and 60 percent of the populace say it’s too soon to resume close interactions—especially since no vaccine for the virus yet exists, more than a million Americans have been infected, and a shocking 57,000 have died already.

While Trump admits “I’m not a doctor” it’s apparent he’s not an engineer, either. Why? Because the White House released what it claims is a “blueprint” to “open up” the country—but instead of specifics, this “non-blueprint” basically says states are on their own to deal with the greatest medical crisis to hit the nation in a century. Were the current occupant of the Oval Office a real engineer, he’d know that a genuine blueprint provides very specific details to produce the desired result, whether building a home, machining a part or, in this case, giving explicit instruction on the testing, tracking, and isolation of coronavirus in the population.

Yet, while the nation’s capital appears rulerless, states are taking steps—some far more risky than others. Montana, for instance, will follow what Governor Steve Bullock calls a “phased in” approach, opening certain businesses with restrictions on a limited basis as a first step. Will it work? Unfortunately, we probably won’t know until about mid-May when it’s very possible the virus will not recede as hoped and may have infected and killed many more. Simply put, the politicians are rolling the dice and, unfortunately, it’s the citizenry that will win or lose on their high-stakes gamble.

Speaking of winning or losing, the environment won with the recent Supreme Court decision that the Clean Water Act applies to discharges of pollutants to groundwaters that drain into rivers, lakes or streams. The disastrous “bad water bills” passed by the Republican-dominated Montana legislature and signed into law by Republican governor Marc Racicot in

Buck up, fellow Montanans. You’ve done a remarkable job of dealing with coronavirus with grace and courtesy. Our challenges will increase, however, as other states drop their travel and social restrictions – and we’ll have to deal with that when it comes. But maybe, just maybe, we’ll see a reversal of part of the “bad water bills” and have cleaner water in our future for all of us.

1995, erased Montana’s once-lauded “non-degradation policy” for state waters and the Montana Constitution’s mandate that “the state and each person shall maintain and improve a healthful environment in Montana for present and future generations.”

Having made such specious methods as “mixing zones” legal for discharge of pollutants into state surface and groundwater, the slow but sure degradation of water quality was assured and has come to pass, betraying Montanans’ constitutional right to a “clean and healthful environment.”

The Supreme Court decision may change that, however. For decades the Big Sky Water and Sewer District has discharged treated sewage to groundwater which of course finds its way down gradient from the canyons to the once-pristine waters of the Gallatin River.

But as reported by the Bozeman Chronicle—and strengthened by the Supreme Court decision—“Cottonwood Environmental Law, Montana Rivers and Gallatin Wildlife Association are seeking up to \$55,800 per day for the alleged illegal discharge, according to the letter they sent to the water and sewer district last week.” The groups say Big Sky doesn’t have the required Clean Water Act permits for such discharges and, should they succeed in their challenge, it would be highly beneficial not only for the Gallatin River, but for all of Montana’s world-famous blue-ribbon rivers.

So buck up, fellow Montanans. You’ve done a remarkable job of dealing with coronavirus with grace and courtesy. Our challenges will increase, however, as other states drop their travel and social restrictions – and we’ll have to deal with that when it comes. But maybe, just maybe, we’ll see a reversal of part of the “bad water bills” and have cleaner water in our future for all of us. ★

—GEORGE OCHENSKI

BYGONE DAYS

Bygone Days are compiled from archives of Montana newspapers. Current years featured are 1896, 1936 and 1961. For daily Bygone Days, follow online at: @MontanaPress on Facebook.

The Dillon Tribune May 1, 1896

“Regarding ‘Huckleberry’ McKune’s death, which recently occurred in Butte, the Standard says, ‘The man who died as he was being taken to the city jail about 2 o’clock yesterday morning, was John H. McKune, better known by the sobriquet of ‘Huckleberry,’ one of the old-time printers of the West. He was formerly a member of the Butte Typographical union, and his body was identified by some of his old acquaintances early yesterday morning. McKune was an original character and was known in every newspaper office in the West. He was one of the owners of the *Townsend Messenger* and had recently worked on the *Basin Times*, *Whitehall Zephyr*, *Pocatello Tribune* and *Dillon Tribune*... Several clippings of frontier poetry and sketches of life in the West which he had written were found in his pockets. Among his papers were letters from his wife, who is in Shoshone, Idaho, and from his mother, who is in Cleveland, Ohio. An inquest was held at the Butte undertaking rooms last evening. The evidence was to the effect that he went into Howard and Harrington’s saloon a little after 12 o’clock yesterday morning, sat down in a chair in the back room and went to sleep and was soon snoring so loudly that he annoyed the others in the saloon. Bob Howard woke him up and told him that he was snoring too loud. ‘All right, I’ll try and make it a note lower,’ replied McKune as he dropped off to sleep again. A few minutes later a man named McKim from Anaconda and several others entered the saloon and treated the house. McKim woke McKune up and called him up to the bar, and he took whisky straight. He took eight more drinks in quick succession and filled the glass each time. When asked to take another drink he replied, ‘No, I’ve had enough.’ He then went back and sat down, and in about five minutes Bob Howard noticed that his head was hanging over and he was frothing at the mouth. Officers ...were summoned and he died at the corner of Park street and the alley leading to the jail.”

The Anaconda Standard May 5, 1896

“Health Officer. An Interesting Review of the Sanitary Conditions...The General health of the city has been uniformly good. No serious epidemics have arisen and no alarming series of diseases has appeared. Typhoid fever during the last summer it was more prevalent than in years. No tangible evidence of its cause could be obtained. Some of the cases were caused by persons drinking water which contained ice obtained from the B.A. & P.R.R. yards. This ice was shipped in here with perishable merchandise and thrown away by the consignee, being afterwards obtained in an unusual manner. Coming from the sloughs of Milwaukee it was infected and thereby caused disease... The city water supply was examined and was not contaminated. I am sure if the

people of the city will restrict their drinking water to that furnished by the city fewer cases will occur this year. Of course milk contamination must be considered, but the danger from this is reduced to a minimum. A number of cases of measles have occurred during this spring. Physicians have not been called to see all of them and effective quarantine measures have therefore not been instituted. I desire to call the attention of citizens to the fact that measles is not a minor disease, but ranks third in the mortality lists of the large cities of the union. Furthermore one attack does not protect against a second or a third one. The earnest cooperation of physicians is requested in reporting all cases of a contagious nature. This Department takes a pardonable pride in calling attention to the fact that the smallpox has not shown itself during the last fiscal year.”

The Big Timber Pioneer May 7, 1896

“The Cocaine Victims. Drug is Sapping the Lives of Thousands. The Habit is Formed Far More Rapidly Than That for Opium or Alcohol. Physicians and medical journals are remarking upon the rapid spread of the habit of using cocaine, says the New York press. About 30 years ago this South American drug was introduced into this country as a medicine, but its active principle was not discovered until a few years ago, by Dr. Weman, a German, who named it cocaine. It gained approval at once. Surgeons used it as a local anaesthetic for operations not extensive enough to call for chloroform or ether. Now physicians and surgeons, as well as their patients, have become habitual takers of the drug as a stimulant. It is one of the most dangerous and one of the newest of vices.”

Big Timber Pioneer May 21, 1936

“Wild Horses Stage Battle in Dillon Street. (Dillon, May 16). A furious fight between two wild stallions on the main street here Saturday gave this southwestern Montana town its greatest excitement since lusty frontier days. Biting, rearing and battering at each other with heavy hoofs, the two stray horses fought almost the full length of



Montana street, while a white mare trotted alongside. Traffic was stopped and startled auto occupants dashed from the path of the struggling pair. One youngster on a bicycle was jerked from in front of the horses just in time to keep from being harmed. The stallions and the mare separated at the edge of town and trotted off toward Blacktail Deer creek.”

Big Timber Pioneer May 21, 1936

“Billings People Thrilled in 1919. Thousands at Circus Sat Still While an Escaped Lion Paraded. Was Gently ‘Shooed’ Back Into His Cage While Vast Throng Waited with Bated Breath; Restraint of Crowd Prevented Panic. Recent announcement that the Al. G. Barnes Circus would show in Montana this summer, recalls a thrilling incident that happened 17 years ago at Billings during an evening performance of the Al G. Barnes circus at that city. The incident as told by newspapers at that time follows: ‘Sit still.’ ‘Don’t move!’ ‘Not a soul must stir.’ ‘Be calm and avoid a stampede.’ These words uttered in stentorian tones by Chief Trainer B.D. Dennis and observed to the letter by several thousand people inside the big tent of the Al G. Barnes circus, during an evening performance at Billings, prevented what ordinarily would have proven a serious panic. A monster lion had escaped from its cage and was parading the paddock majestically. It was a tense moment. The tent was taxed to its capacity to witness the evening performance, and the program had been effectively carried out when near the end of the card, a lion stunt had been successfully completed in a large iron cage which occupied what would be the center ring of a three ring circus. The hot weather had put many of the animals in a mood none too pleasant and they evinced an ugly disposition and were slow to respond to the command of the trainer. However, the animals were started out through the runway connecting the display cage with their private cages and the animals were all safely enclosed save one which presumably remained in the chute. ...After the wagons pulled away, the lion leaped from the end of the chute and calmly marched into the tent. His appearance was so sudden and the people so unprepared for such an event that fortunately none moved. Chief Trainer B.D. Dennis at once realized the seriousness of the situation and issued his commands. He was the personification of self control and issued his orders a la General Foch. The animal marched the entire length of the left-hand section of the reserved seats and at one time was within 10 or 12 feet of the main entrance and it looked for a moment as if he would gain his freedom. With uplifted whip, Dennis walked backward behind him and finally halted the agile animal, which walked and pranced by turns. Finally, the animal turned and started to retrace his steps toward the iron cage. He walked along the netting separating him from the people in the reserved seat section. Circus employees realized that a crisis was imminent and began forming a human runway for the animal. The huge cage gate was thrown open quickly and hearing the rattle occasioned by the clanking of the bars, the lion spied the opening and slunk into his bastille. The band had ceased playing, and two of the most tense moments imaginable had a happy ending. Men, women, and children breathed a sigh of relief. ‘I have been with circuses for seven years and this is the first time an animal has got away from me,’ said Dennis, when seen later. ‘I certainly

wish to give the people credit for great presence of mind,” continued the trainer. “I have seen stampedes and panics caused by far less pretentious situations, and I was fearful that someone would lose his presence of mind and seek to gain a higher seat. Had this been attempted there is no doubt that the lion would have sought to claw or capture him. A mad scramble would have followed, and the outcome is easily pictured, as circus tents do not afford a very good race course. The outcome was certainly gratifying and I am sincerely pleased.”

The Billings Gazette May 25, 1961

“Movie Cowboy Comes Riding Very Special Pinto Into Hotel Lobby. Stragglers from the stockgrowers convention who were getting a late start home Wednesday stirred themselves in chairs in the Northern Hotel Lobby. The noise, it seemed, came from the hotel’s west entrance. It went clip-clop, clip-clop. Sharper ears caught the creak of leather. An erstwhile conventioneer looked around. ‘Sounds,’ he observed to no one in particular, ‘just like someone riding a horse in here.’ He watched the man who’d just come in the hotel approach the registration desk. ‘It even looks,’ he said, blinking, ‘like someone riding a horse in here.’ He blinked twice, shook his head then lay back in his chair, eyes closed. (It had been that kind of a convention. The rider—who turned out to be Montie Montana, a movie cowboy and trick rider on his way to Miles City for a bucking-horse sale—enjoyed the impromptu stunt...His horse, a pinto, enjoyed it. Joseph Burnie Callihan—who doesn’t care what people ride into the hotel, as long as they come in—watched Montana’s mount execute a tricky dance step on its way out the door. ‘That, he said, capitalizing the words out of sheer force of habit, ‘is a Very Special Pony.’ The man in the chair opened his eyes. He smiled, a comfortable satisfied smile. ‘Always works,’ he said, looking around. ‘I shut my eyes for a minute—and when I open them whatever it was I thought I saw is always gone.’ He looked relieved. Almost as relieved as the bellmen who were on duty when it all happened.” ★

Bygone Days are compiled by Jen Eames.

UNSOLVED MONTANA

Bozeman's Only Uncleared Homicide in 50 Years

February 10, 1985. Under the icy, clear winter sky, the Bozeman Pizza Hut at 2300 West Main Street closed and was locked at midnight.

Randy Church, a 23-year-old Montana State University student, turned off the front lights and stayed to wash the tables and scrub the ovens. It was a run-of-the-mill Saturday night, a steady spill of customers dining in, mostly college students, and plenty of delivery orders dispersed to dorms across campus and adjacent student housing.

Randy worked about 15 hours per week at the restaurant, responsibilities he balanced with a full load of electrical and computer engineering courses. Now, he was the shift supervisor, covering the nighttime for a coworker who requested the weekend off.

"A nice fellow with great promise," as his college advisor at Montana State University later described him, Randy was known to contribute when asked, and to be giving with his time. While there should have been two employees at closing time paired together, Randy, "a slow closer," according to one coworker, was in the store by himself.

Sometime around 3 a.m., there was a knock on the rear door of the restaurant. Randy opened the door to face the wintry darkness.

All of a sudden, someone pumped two .22 caliber bullets into his head. Randy was shot the first time directly below an eye, and the second time in the back of his head, killing him instantly. His bullet-riddled body was found at approximately 9:30 a.m. Sunday morning, near the cash register and safe, by business manager Jeff Pierce, after Pierce was called to unlock the doors when Church failed to meet an employee there at 9 a.m.

Sgt. Ron Green of the Bozeman Police Department said the day after the murder that the police were assuming that robbery was the motive for the shooting. He said that police had no suspects and "no idea why Church (wittingly) let the assailant in." Green speculated that Randy, perhaps thinking that friends had stopped by to visit with him after the store had closed, had allowed the

perpetrator inside of the restaurant. Green said that the store's safe "was not open" and that the total take that morning obtained in the commission of appropriating this young man's life was roughly \$1,000.

The autopsy performed on Randy showed no obvious signs of any resistance, Green later said. There were no alarms at the restaurant, though Green noted that an alarm probably would not have saved Randy in his situation.

Bozeman residents and the family of Randy Church were taken aback over the news of the slaying, "apparently the first murder in Bozeman in more than eight years," according to the Bozeman Daily Chronicle. The last murder in Bozeman, according to the Chronicle, occurred in September 1976, when a man named Anthel "Bobo" Brown killed another in a robbery at Hoadley's Standard gas station.

"It was a horrible thing. I can't understand why anyone would do something like that," said Randy's uncle, Wesley Church of Havre, to the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*. "Randy was really a nice young man, always energetic with an exceptional personality. It's a terrible tragedy for the family."

Pizza Hut offered a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons "responsible for this heinous crime." A memorial service was held at the Holland-Bonine Funeral Chapel in Havre and burial followed at the Highland Cemetery. A memorial service was also held at the Danforth Chapel on the MSU campus and a scholarship in Randy's name was funded.

Thirty-five years later, the young man's murder remains a sad, lost footnote in the annals of Bozeman, the sole "uncleared" homicide in the last 50 years on the city's books. Adding to the heartbreak, lead investigator Ron Green believes that he once came face to face with Randy's killers, and that justice for Randy was squandered in a bureaucratic maze.

THE SENSITIVE, CREATIVE LIFE OF RANDY CHURCH

Randy Church was born on September 28, 1961, in Havre to Richard and Darlene Church, the second youngest of their five children. Richard Church, a native of the Harlem-area on the Hi-Line, and Darlene, a native of Havre, had married in 1955.

Richard Church supported the family of seven, employed as a machinist with the Great Northern Railway, one of the economic drivers of several small, rural towns along US Highway 2 like Havre. Based out of the train repair and refueling station depot in Havre, Richard worked the same shift for many years, 2 to 11 p.m.

Darlene, described as "the loving type" by one of the Church siblings, stayed at home with the children and worked as the main cook at the Pancake House and other local restaurants. Randy clung closely to his mother and often accompanied her to the train depot to deliver Richard his home-cooked dinner.

"Randy was the most sensitive of the siblings," says Rick Church, his older brother. "He was the person who kept the family connected, and who could relate to everyone

in the family. Dad was a hard guy, and Randy could communicate and connect with everyone, including our father.

Several characteristics defined Randy from the onset of his teens, namely creativity and industriousness. Instead of something store-bought, he would wax his father's car as a birthday present. With eager facility, he shined shoes at a local barber shop.

Skinny and modest, Randy was a perfectly ordinary kid who enjoyed goofing off with and chasing his brothers around their property, typically until his asthma forced him to scale it back. As a teenager, he fell in love with electronics, computers and the power and torque of muscle cars. His first car was a Dodge Charger, which he used to travel back and forth to his job at the Iron Horse restaurant in Havre. There, Randy was employed as a dishwasher, busboy, and cook; at one point he worked alongside his mother Darlene, who helped run the kitchen.

"I was one year older than Randy, but we were in the same grade because I got left back," says Randy's brother Robert Church. "We were in the same classes. Randy was always very balanced. I'd come home and he'd be studying. He could party and still do well in school."

"We used to ride motorbikes together," says Randy's cousin Rusty (who requested that his last name be withheld). "We were pretty close to the same age. What's always stuck out to me the most was when Randy rode his bicycle out here in the summer time, maybe age 13 or so, forty miles from Havre, twenty miles of pavement, and the rest of gravel. He was one of my best buddies."

Randy attended Northern Montana College for one year (1982-83) before transferring to Montana State University as an electrical engineering student.

"Randy was extremely intelligent and he had a heart of gold," says his long-ago friend Gene Meek. "I'm not just saying that because he is deceased. He would help anybody with their studying, their school work. He was kind, and he had an absolute heart of gold."

"One person I thought he always reminded me of a bit was Sonny from Sonny and Cher," says Randy's friend Suzie Williams. "Just from overall physical looks and things; he was really skinny. He loved to ride motorcycles and go out in his blue VW bug and go hill climbing. He owned a '69 green Firebird. We would go motorcycle riding in Havre and the Bear Paw's mountains. I met Randy in a college calculus class in Havre. It was a small class of six kids and we got to know each other."

Randy's college résumé listed his favorite interests and activities as motorcycling, rafting, and "applying programming knowledge to labor and payroll system needs."

In the fall quarter at Montana State, Randy received three As and one B. He had an overall grade point average of 3.4, and had recently been nominated for the engineering honorary fraternity, Tau Beta Pi. "He worked awfully hard to get through school," said Bruce McLeod, an electrical engineering professor who had Church in two classes in 1985. "He was a typical kid from Montana. He knew how to work and knew what he wanted."



"Randy would've been very excited with these modern computers and smart phones and how they've progressed," recalls his brother Robert Church, who received a letter sent from his brother within days of the crime. "He had a basic computer back then, and he loved technology, and he loved learning about it. He would've loved all of this change. He embraced life."

Randy started working at Pizza Hut in Bozeman in February 1983, advancing from waiter, to cook, to shift supervisor, a position that entailed responsibilities he enjoyed, including controlling the cost of sales and labor and operating expenditures. The job supplied him with money, a concrete work history, and a boost of self-confidence.

Then, one winter night Randy closed the store. Shortly thereafter, someone filched his life, snatched a good deal of money in exchange, and left a smart kid with a positive future murdered in a pool of heavy blood.

ROBBERY AS MOTIVE

Police were never able to determine whether Randy was slain because he refused to give the gunman the money, or if the gunman killed Randy so there would not be a witness. According to available police and media reports, the back door of the restaurant had a peephole, but it would have been difficult for Randy to see who was standing outside in the dark.

It appears as if Randy should not have been in the building alone. The assistant manager of the Pizza Hut in Bozeman, Jan Brandon, said in an interview shortly after the crime that "there are supposed to be two people on duty at night, and the back door is supposed to be locked at midnight." Brandon suggested that Randy might have opened the back door thinking it was "probably a fellow employee."

Randy's friend Suzie Williams remembers that, one week before Randy was killed, she and her boyfriend David, an employee at the same Pizza Hut, were startled in the back end of the restaurant by a group of people who appeared after closing time.

"They had come in the side door after closing," says Suzie. "Someone had gone out the side door earlier that day and it didn't latch correctly. Unless it was something extremely personal no one knew about, I couldn't think of any reason someone would want to do that to Randy."

It's possible that since Randy was supposed to be opening the next morning, he intended to stay at the restaurant overnight, and that he was working on homework when the intruder entered.

Bill Davis of Billings, at the time the regional director of Pizza Hut, told the Associated Press in 1985 that Pizza Huts "in large inner cities" had alarm buttons that employees could push to notify police. But that system was yet to be in effect in Pizza





Randy is described by friends and family as a typical kid from Montana who knew how to work and knew what he wanted. He loved to ride motorcycles, drive his blue VW bug or '69 green Firebird and go hill climbing. He would help anybody with their studying or their school work and he was kind. "He had an absolute heart of gold," one friend noted.

Huts in Montana or Wyoming because crimes rates in those states were not "high enough to warrant it."

The restaurant's bank bag and approximately 25 checks in a vinyl bag were found later in a ditch on Jackrabbit Lane near Belgrade. There also was a theft of \$911 reported the Sunday morning that Randy was killed at the Town Pump in Bozeman.

LOCAL SUSPECTS IDENTIFIED

Michael Nickelson, 19, of Livingston was named as a suspect in the Randy Church killing after he was taken into custody for the slaying of a co-worker at Yellowstone National Park. In the summer of 1985, Nickelson beat to death Randy Dean Reddog of Wolf Point near Old Faithful in Yellowstone. Bozeman Police Sgt. Stan Kenney said that an inmate "who met Nickelson while they both were in custody" alerted authorities that Nickelson had told him that he was involved in the Pizza Hut murder.

Kenney said that police "were not able to prove that Nickelson was at the crime scene," and that Nickelson "refused to discuss it." Nickelson was charged with – and later convicted of – an armed robbery of the Heritage Inn in Bozeman several weeks after the Pizza Hut homicide. Later convicted of the park slaying, Nickelson was never charged in connection with Randy's death.

Soon after Randy's homicide, police questioned James Livermore, 25, a man arrested in Livingston and charged with robbing a gas station there on February 9, 1985. In that incident, Livermore menaced the clerk of a Town Pump with a pistol and fled with \$700. Authorities, however, could find no apparent connection between the robbery of the Livingston Town Pump and the shooting of Randy Church in Bozeman the next day. Two .22-caliber shells found at Pizza Hut could not be conclusively matched with the ballistics of the pistol that was used by Livermore.

NEW MEXICO PRISON ESCAPEES

Ray B. Schrivner, 53, and Mark St. Clair, 37, escaped from a state prison in Albuquerque, New Mexico on January 7, 1985. St. Clair was serving 30 years for the murder of a New Mexico deputy sheriff, and Schrivner was serving 20 years for armed robbery and kidnapping. The two men stole a beige 1983 Mazda in Colorado and headed north from New Mexico through Montana to Saskatchewan, Canada, and were believed to

have entered Canada north of Plentywood or Wolf Point.

The duo crossed the border the day after Randy was killed and were eventually arrested on February 21, 1985, by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) near Nipawin, Saskatchewan, near the city of Prince Albert.

A map authorities found in their vehicle had a route drawn on it from Colorado, where the vehicle was stolen, through Montana, entering Montana on Highway 87 southeast

of Billings and continuing west to Bozeman. Several witnesses later claimed to have seen two similar looking strangers in the vicinity.

Sgt. Ron Green thought that the snowy tire tracks left at the Pizza Hut would be worth matching against the escapees' vehicle; if the outlined map he had been informed of could definitely place them near Bozeman the night of February 10, 1985, he would have a hot lead. The escapee's fingerprints were sent to the state crime lab in Missoula to check against prints taken at the scene. The results of these tests are unknown.

Green traveled to Prince Albert on March 18, 1995 to interview Schrivner and St. Clair. According to Green, he flew from Bozeman to Winnipeg, and then to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where he was escorted to Nipawin by the RCMP.

According to Detective Green, the duo seemed like the most likely suspects, linked by the map, as well as the shoe prints and tire tracks similar to those gathered at the crime, and, finally their own incriminating statements.

"It was at a time of a recent snowfall so car tracks, footprints were easily photographed," says Ron Green, in 2020. "In the car was a map from Colorado to Montana. [The map went] from Billings to Bozeman, Montana, back to Billings, and crossing at the Canadian Border, near Plentywood, Montana. Not sure how they managed to cross the border... The RCMP called asking about crimes that had



happened in Montana. After an interview with the suspects and getting certain information that they should not have known, seeing the shoes they were wearing and the tires on the car, I was certain they were involved. [We] brought the tires back on the plane and other info. This was all turned over to County Attorney, Marty Lambert, and items sent to FBI."

The two fugitives fought against their extradition and lost. Green says that upon return to the US, the suspects were first held in North Dakota and then released to the custody of New Mexico authorities.

"The Gallatin County attorney, Marty Lambert, decided not to bring them to Bozeman for a hearing," says Green. "They were being returned to prison in New Mexico, and they were being charged for escape, and had to finish out the original life in prison charges."

According to information obtained from the Public Information Officer at the New Mexico Corrections Department, both Schrivner and St. Clair died "of natural causes" in prison.

"NOT A COLD UNSOLVED CASE"

Officer Ron Green planned to retire from the Bozeman Police Department in May 1985, but stayed on the job longer, hoping to close the books on the Randy Church murder.

"I really did believe they [the New Mexico prison escapees] were involved," says Green in 2020. "Without my testimony at a hearing I was lost and felt it was the [Gallatin] County attorney [Marty Lambert] who did not want to waste his time if they were returning to prison."

"I do not view this as a cold, unsolved case," continues Green. "A hearing would have resolved this one way or the other. After my retirement, many detectives had tried to reopen the case without any new information to solving this. I am saddened by the fact this is still a cold case and, yes, I am reminded many times about this case without ever had being able to testify."

Despite his strong inclination, Green concedes that there was not as much substantive evidence as he would have liked to pinpoint the New Mexico men to the crime – no witnesses, no ballistics, no confessions, and no weapon. Perhaps further obscuring the mystery of Randy's death, police have never officially eliminated other suspects, including



Photos of Randy Church with his ex-girlfriend Suzie Mattson in the early 1980s.

a man "who served time in Wisconsin for murder," according to available police and media reports, and who "was in Bozeman at the time of the shooting and who knew Church."

According to emails obtained between Bozeman authorities and members of the Church family, a remaining person of interest in the case is one of Randy's co-employees at Bozeman Pizza Hut, someone who moved into the apartment at 301 W. Story, in Bozeman that Randy vacated shortly before his murder. On top of this, Bozeman authorities contacted several of Randy's siblings in 2015 about obtaining a DNA sample, "to help separate the DNA from the crime scene, but then they never followed up," says Rick Church.

Time and time again leads were established yet no charges in the killing of Randy Church were ever levied against anyone, a pattern deemed cruel and insufficient by his family and friends. Questioned about the media and police reports corroborating Green's timeline of activities, Marty Lambert, now in his sixth term as Gallatin County attorney, declined to comment on the murder of Randy Church. He did say that he was "a homicide survivor and victim" and that he needed "to get conversant again in the status of the case and the investigation."

"It's almost a daily occurrence that Randy is a part of some thought," says his friend Suzie Williams. "I wonder what it would be like for him to still be around, and what he would've done."

Randy's sister, Ruby Burney, says that her multiple questions about the lack of transparency in Randy's death have yet to be answered.

"Why would you do that to him and his family? His mother and father didn't get the answers they needed. Why is it that everybody has apparently forgotten about this case? I can't forget about this case. It's a part of my life."

A FATHER'S HAUNTING WORDS

Two years after Randy's murder, his father, Richard Church, told the Associated Press that he had "little hope" that authorities would ever track down and punish those who murdered his son. His bitterness was palpable.

"If they do find the guy, they won't do anything about it," Richard Church was quoted as saying. "They'll throw him in prison and feed the sucker. And that ain't good enough in my book... They should catch the guy and give him the same medicine he gave my son... and I'd like to do it."

Richard, who passed in 2010, made sure he had his tombstone connected with Randy's at the cemetery. Randy's mother, Darlene, died in 2017. Three of Randy's four siblings each named one of their children after their lost brother.

"If there is one thing in this world I would change, it would be going back to that Saturday night," says his brother Robert Church. "I'd somehow go back to that Saturday night and get him out of there before he got killed." ★

—BRIAN D'AMBROSIO

Please visit the Justice for Randy Church Facebook page for additional information or to leave a tip about Randy's case. For future "Unsolved Montana" suggestions, author Brian D'Ambrosio may be reached at dambrosiobrian@hotmail.com

MONTANA PROFILE

Climbing High in Missoula: Evelyn Wall

Evelyn Wall first discovered the sport of climbing in 2005 while doing Tai Chi in a park in her hometown of Billings. She noticed a group of people bouldering, an intense subset of climbing that requires the climber to summit a boulder free of a rope or harness. Wall asked to join the group and they happened to have an extra pair of shoes in her size. Her first time climbing she says she found an unrivaled gratification in the puzzle and rigor of the sport.

Wall is now a successful climber and adventure guide and an up-and-coming activist in Missoula. As one of nearly 25,000 LGBTQ identifying adults in Montana, Wall made the transition as a transgender woman about a year ago.

She says she was initially scared of losing the support she gained in the outdoor community over the years but, although it was a decision she'd been waffling over for more than a decade, she confesses that she needed to do it for herself.

The majority of people she came out to about her decision were supportive.

"They were just like 'Oh! This is beautiful. This is wonderful. I'm so glad that we get to meet who you are,'" Wall says. "I was really enriched by that and supported by and affirmed by this community."

Not everyone has supported her, though. Wall explains she lost some friends and most of her family due to her transition. Yet she still had a strong second family in the outdoor community and says she thought that social connection was something that could benefit other LGBTQ folks. This experience led her to want to share the sense of community with others in similar situations.

Wall founded "Out There Missoula," a University of Montana outdoor activity club, to provide outdoor mentorship for people of LGBTQ identity. Since launching Out There in the summer of 2019, the club has gained more than 300 members.

Wall says Out There Missoula was created to give a free, healthy wellness option to the LGBTQ community, noting that everybody, no matter their financial situation, should be able to experience the outdoors.

Wall is active across Missoula serving on boards for a number of different activist organizations including Kaleidoscope, an organization where LGBTQ people of all religions can safely explore their spirituality. She's also given talks on the UM campus, including at the annual DiverseU event, and has even started a bathroom equity group that is working to craft gender-neutral bathroom signs to install around Missoula.

A PERSONAL STORY

Evelyn Wall was born in Massachusetts but says she moved a lot as a young child due to her father being a Green Beret in the U.S. Army Special Forces. She moved to Billings, Montana when she was in third grade and her father retired from the military to become a psychiatrist.

In Billings, Wall recalls hearing a lot of derogatory things about LGBTQ people. At age 12, she started to recognize her effeminate nature and also started becoming uncomfortable anytime someone referred to her as a "handsome man." In high school, she had secret boyfriends and felt ashamed

for not being able to be with them openly but also feared retaliation if she acted on her feelings. When she was just 16 years old, Wall discovered her father after he had committed suicide and the event only added grief to her personal turmoil.

In 2007, just after graduating from Skyview High School, Wall moved to Missoula. She was in and out of the University of Montana for about nine years, mostly due to financial struggles, but she graduated in 2016 with a bachelor's degree in genetics and evolution. Now, in 2020, Wall has started in the Master in Public Administration program at the University of Montana.

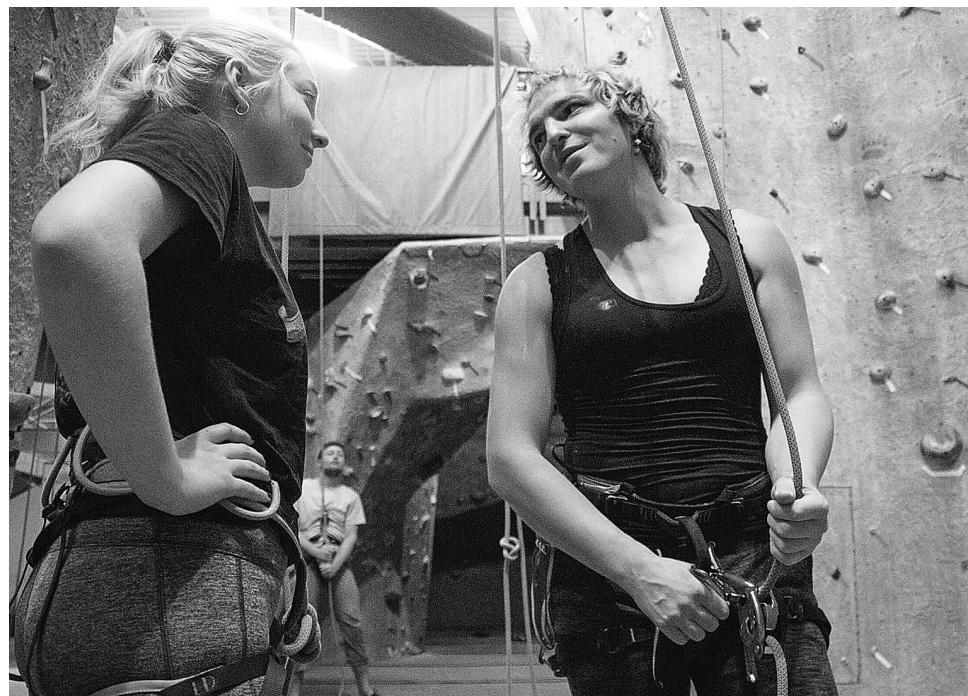
She was planning to get her master's degree in computer science and then her Ph.D in evolutionary ecology. Her work with Out There, however, made her realize that advocacy could be the right career path.

"I had no intention when I started Out There to become an activist," Wall says. "I fell in love with the work and the people that I was working with and the satisfaction of making a project and seeing it through and seeing it actually help people."

Cas Kendley, a fellow LGBTQ advocate who has worked with Out There Missoula says he looks up to Wall's capability as an activist and her boots-on-the-ground approach.

"Evelyn is so tenacious really, and she comes to activism with such determination and in public with such a smile and such charisma," Cas says.

Wall has now spent a lot of time in Montana's great outdoors, mastering traditional and ice climbing, white water rafting and kayaking and even has led many trips as both a river guide and a climbing guide. Wall's love for the outdoors has inspired her to mentor a number of people who also have gone on to become guides.



Right now, Wall says her favorite thing to do is snorkel the Clark Fork river, which runs through Missoula. She straps on flippers and a snorkel and makes a game of snagging trash before the current sweeps her downriver. Although Wall says she used to enjoy daring adventures, she has taken a step back from her risk-taking tendencies since her transition.

"I did a lot of that stuff to sort of prove myself in a gender I thought I really needed to be because I was worried people were gonna find out that I was really effeminate," Wall says. "I still have a huge passion for those areas, but what I love more is teaching people and giving them the tools to go out and explore."

One of Evelyn's last serious climbing mentees was Bryson Allen, a careful, thoughtful climber and one of the best students Evelyn admittedly ever had. When Allen graduated from UM in 2018, Evelyn helped him get a job in Juneau, Alaska as a climbing guide. She suggested that he should climb the Mendenhall Towers, a ridge of seven huge granite spires that jut out of the glacier above Juneau.

Tragically, however, Bryson died in an accident on the Mendenhall Towers in June 2019.

"We don't have Bryson anymore," Wall says. "How willing do I want to be to teach people the kind of stuff that got him killed?"

She says she almost stopped Out There Missoula in its tracks when Allen died, devastated that someone she taught perished in such a horrible way. She sought out his family and several of her climbing mentors and listened to their perspectives.

"He was just such a wonderful human being. He was really enriched and in love with that space and there's lots of people like him," Wall says. "I don't want those people to be in dangerous positions because they don't have the resources to learn this stuff or because they don't feel comfortable learning it from another place. So, I felt a lot more at ease with continuing to do this work, but it definitely made me pause for thought."

Now, she says she is even more wary of risky situations and refuses to accept laziness when it comes to safety.

UPHILL ALL THE WAY

Wall admits she has struggled with a lot, from finding her father after his death to losing close friends and grappling with her own gender identity for over a decade. She says that coming out as a transgender woman was among the most difficult things she has ever done.

She compares it to climbing remote, towering cliffs when she is up so high her partner's voice is lost in the distance; she is losing her grip and her hands are so cold her fingers are too numb to feel the holds. The wind whips her face and the rope flaps like a flag and she's not even sure she's on the route anymore.

"You could be off-route and doing something that maybe isn't even doable, and you just have to take your gear and your skill set and move carefully," she says. "And that's sort of what transition feels like for me. You take what you learned before and you move very carefully into, hopefully, a place with a better perspective."

She says she was lucky to have transgender friends in the climbing community to stand by her through the transition. They were there to support her, just as they would on a rock wall.

"That's sort of what climbing relationships are: I'm holding the rope for you, I can't protect you from what you're going to hit on the way down before that rope comes tight, but I'll be damned if that rope's gonna fly





through my hands. I got you on this end, as much as I can get you. Go do the thing, you've got this," Wall says.

In the wake of her gender transition, Wall says she is often on the receiving end of a lot of discrimination. She gets shocked stares in public places like hardware stores and she has even heard coworkers say it's okay to murder LGBTQ people. She says many people have come to her fearful or upset, asking for help.

"If you really want to help this community, give them a shot. Give them a job," Wall says.

She readily admits that not all of her experiences have been bad. A lot of people she interacts with are kind and supportive.

One way Wall combats discrimination is by training Out There Missoula members to be competent guides themselves. She works to secure funding for guide training and has lined up jobs for people in Parks and Recreation and the GUTS and GRITS programs at the YWCA.

Wall says she was proud to have found the funds to buy 60 pairs of climbing shoes from La Sportiva for members of Out There Missoula to use. She wrote a letter to the

Photos by Claire Skinner

company and received a 20 percent discount before procuring the rest of the funding from the Associated Students of the University of Montana. She also helped more than 30 people get their climbing certifications.

Wall says her primary goal is to encourage people to be supportive in any way they can.

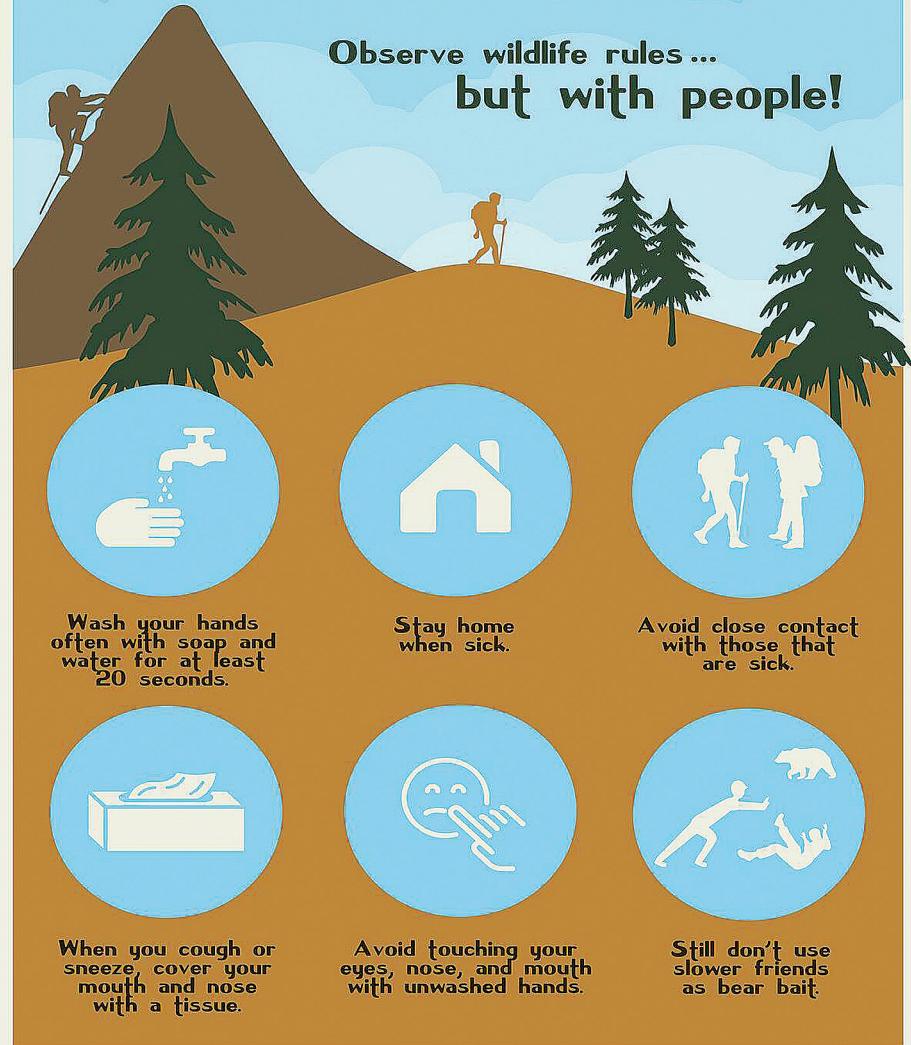
"There are lots of simple things people can do to support each other," she says. Helping people learn how to put on makeup, get their hair cut or access new clothes are only some examples supporters might consider.

Wall explains that encouraging acceptance is the biggest thing that people can do to be supportive, "Maybe you don't run a business; you can't help someone get a job or you're not a landlord. That's understandable. Lots of us are not those people, but there are other little things that you can maybe do too, but that follow through really helps." ★

—MAZANA BOERBOOM

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MONTANA BOOKS

Choose Your Own Adventure: Danica Winters

Where do Harlequin suspense authors get their mind-bending story ideas? In the case of bestselling Missoula phenom Danica Winters, oftentimes the stories find her, thanks to real-life interactions with cops, special operatives—and one unforgettable serial killer next door.

Consider her latest Harlequin Intrigue title, “Protective Operation,” the fourth and final book in her Stealth series. In it, Shaye Geist, seeking refuge from her crooked Algerian prime minister father, tracks down gunslinger Chad Martin in the wilds of Montana, also on the run from terrorists. Their shared odyssey ratchets up a few notches when they find an abandoned baby, whose safety may cost them their lives.

Her newest book “Protective Operation” features stories drawn from real-life experiences of fellow Montanans.

“That was based on a friend of mine who was a military contractor for Blackwater,” Winters explains, “And I have a friend who trains canines for police work and we were talking about doing the same thing, because there are a ton of people here in Montana that are involved in the Spec-ops (Special Operations) world, SEALs and Deltas and Green Berets. That’s kind of how it came about, and we’re looking to expand that.”

Heroine Shaye Geist also has a real-life origin that speaks to the author’s commitment to women’s equality.

“Her name is actually a conglomeration of the names of two women who were the first women to graduate Rangers school,” Winters says. “That was just 2015 or 2016; it wasn’t even that long ago. I love writing those type of women who are just like ‘take no names, take no prisoners.’”

In many ways, Winters’ own tale reads more like fiction than fact.



MONTANA ROOTS

“My parents were Missoula blue-collar workers and stressed all the time with my two older siblings, both brothers, so I was the accident baby who was forgotten, sort of under the table,” she recalls. “I was way late in life for my parents, who thought they were over having kids, so I escaped into books a lot. Remember those books where you could pick your own adventure? I still feel like I’m living one of those, being a writer.”

Though she earned scholarships for poetry at the University of Montana, she graduated in anthropology, largely inspired by a love of the outdoors and travel.

“I studied a lot of forensics and did an archeological dig; I worked for the university and went up to British Columbia and did all of that. I like to be outside,” she says with a chuckle.

Was she tempted to stay in academics? Not at all, she says.

“When I was young and coming from Montana, I was told that I could be one of three things as a female: a teacher, a nurse or a secretary. And I was like, I don’t want to be a secretary. I worked at night in an ICU to put myself through college and just hated it. I have kids, 10 and 13, but I have zero desire to be a teacher for young children. I did not see myself following that typical gender role path.”

Instead, and somewhat ironically, Winters submitted a short story to a contest sponsored by a small publishing company. When she won, she was offered a job – not as an author but as a publicist within its marketing department.

“I did it for like three years. It was long enough to know that I had a passion there; I loved following books from creation to publication to sales and seeing people’s work being rewarded. It is such a personal journey. I went to my first writer’s meeting and they were like, ‘Are you a writer?’ and I said, ‘Nope, but I want to be!’ (laughs) So I sat down and wrote a business plan and said five years from today, I want to be with Harlequin, because they’re kind of the gold standard in romance. So every decision I made, including quitting the publishing house, was with that ultimate goal in mind.”

FROM PUBLISHING TO WRITING

“It absolutely did, but in a good way. I’m one of those weird authors, especially working with Harlequin, where you’re producing so much that you don’t have time to get wrapped up in the little details. You know them, you have them, you write them out and put them down on paper, but like the next book, they’re gone. For a person who writes one book a year, they can really just get into their characters’ world, and their own worlds, too.”

Winters credits fellow romantic suspense author B.J. Daniels with helping to dropkick her out of publishing and onto the Amazon, Walmart and Publishers Weekly bestseller lists.



“I grew up here in Missoula. I travel a ton; I love to travel and experience as much as I can from the world, but I love coming home. I get homesick when I’m gone for too long. It’s pretty sad, but I can’t have no mountains; I need my mountains or I get lost,” she says. “Actually, it was B.J. who said, ‘Write what you know, and Montana is something you really, really know,’ and I was like yeah. So the second I started doing it was the second I started breaking into the market as a writer.”

Since her first Intrigue novel, “Smoke and Ashes,” hit bookshelves in 2016, Winters has been busy reinventing the traditional Harlequin romance for a modern audience, at a mind-numbing clip of three to four books a year. In the process, she has acquired local sources in law enforcement and Spec-ops who have proven invaluable in helping make her fictional adventures credible – and at times, uncomfortable.

“I have one character that is based on a friend of mine that I’ve known since I was like 15 years old, and he’s a police officer now where I live and we’re friends. Our kids grow up together and play basketball together now, but I always go to him for questions about law enforcement,” she says. “The other day, I was researching a book and I said to him, ‘Hey, if in Missoula there’s a sniper and they’re sitting downtown and they do something, how would the police officers respond?’ and he’s telling me all about it. So three weeks later, there’s a sniper shooting downtown, the first one ever in the history of our city, and he’s like, ‘Where were you?’ And I’m like, ‘I swear, I had nothing to do with that! I drove through there at like 11 and it happened at 9.’ And he’s like, ‘OK, I don’t have to write up a report today.’”

“And it’s kind of this joke because several of the things that I’ve written about have happened. It’s so weird. This one was just off-the-wall goofy. That’s my next Harlequin to hit the shelves, the start of my next six-book series. I’ve made friends with some amazing people in this journey. We get to live a thousand lives and we get to do whatever we want to do and interview whomever we want to interview and it’s so much fun.”

BRUSHES WITH REAL LIFE CRIME

Winters’ casual acquaintance with Caressa Hardy, also identified in court records as Glenn Dibley, a next-door neighbor who was eventually convicted of murder, dug in deep enough to inspire the dark side of her fiction for years to come.

“In real life, my neighbor was a serial killer.

It was a ‘Dateline’ [on NBC] and everything. The first time I met him, I was running, this guy pulled over and he had a kid in the car, and he was like, ‘Hey, you’re a beautiful woman, and I am almost as beautiful a woman as you,’ and he was dressed as a man. And I was like, ‘Okay, congratulations, but I don’t care, nice to meet you.’ But that was a strange intro. And we got to talking and I said, ‘Well, your daughter is about the same age as my daughter and that’s very cool. Is she going to school?’ and he says, ‘No, she’s not going to school.’ And I was like, OK, whatever, I’m out. I don’t have room to judge anyone. I write romance novels and I get judged for it a lot, so whatever, float your boat, man.”

“So he, at that time, was dressing as a woman. We live in a little town outside of Missoula and you would see him occasionally at the post office dressed as a woman, and then he got implants. And I was like, okay, whatever. But it turned out he was keeping his girlfriend hostage in their house next door to me and he was stealing her identity. So he actually had taken her legal name and was transitioning into her, into looking like her.”

“It is crazy!” Winters admits. “So they had a couple of men that were in their house and I met those guys and there were some weird, hinky prostitution things going on... and I had told my friends who were the sheriff and the sheriff’s deputy that this dude is wackadoo. But at the same time, you’re like, am I keying into something because he’s transgendered or is it just a different lifestyle than what I live? In Montana, we very much have this live-and-let-live lifestyle. And so everybody is keyed in on him from the police department standpoint but he hasn’t done anything. So it turned out that he killed the two dudes who were living with them and was embezzling money from their bank accounts. They think that he would take these men from like Craigslist or Facebook... and kill them and take their money, and that’s how they were sustaining their lifestyle. He and his girlfriend had had 4, 5, 6 children throughout their relationship, and CTS had taken the kids in California, then they moved to Wyoming, then Montana, but they think that they were kind of killing the whole way and taking these single, older men’s incomes and signing their checks and taking their money.”

“They caught the guy in 2017. I was actually in Florida when it happened, and my friend who is the deputy called and he was like, ‘Where would you guys hide a body?’ And I was like, ‘Hey, hypothetical? Or do you think I killed somebody?’ because I know I Google



some weird shit. And he was like, 'No. I'm standing in your neighbor's acreage yard and we're looking for remains.' So we just kind of answered some questions and the FBI and all of these people got involved, and the guy was arrested, obviously. He tried to hire a hit man from jail to kill his girlfriend/wife/lady because she was the only one that can testify against him. Twice, he tried to hire a hit man. So I just got done writing that one, and that one comes out in May."

"I fictionalized it obviously, ...but it's based on that story and my interactions with him," Winters says. "It's just such a crazy, crazy story. And every time I would see this guy, because he was just down the road, he would say, 'You're going to write my story someday.' And yeah; it gives me chills, but I actually did end up writing his story."

Hardy was convicted in May 2019 of double homicide of Thomas Korjack, 62, and

Since her first Intrigue novel, "Smoke and Ashes," hit bookshelves in 2016, Danica Winters has been busy reinventing the traditional Harlequin romance for a modern audience, at a mind-numbing clip of three to four books a year. In the process, she has acquired local sources in law enforcement and special operations who have proven invaluable in helping make her fictional adventures credible – and at times, uncomfortable, including one character based on a friend she's known since her early life, a police officer in the Montana community where she now lives. In her latest Harlequin Intrigue title, "Protective Operation," the fourth and final book in her Stealth series, heroine Shaye Geist seeks refuge from her crooked Algerian prime minister father, tracks down gunslinger Chad Martin in the wilds of Montana, and they go on the run from terrorists. Their shared odyssey ratchets up a few notches when they find an abandoned baby, whose safety may cost them their lives. One of the characters in her new book is based on a friend who was a military contractor for Blackwater. Research for her books sometimes involves experiencing some of the adventures her characters experience, like a helicopter ride with a seasoned pilot (at left).

Robert Orozco, 37. The bodies of the two men were never officially recovered and no death certificates were ever issued.

The author recently wrapped up another real-life first, a frustrating court case against an out-of-state online stalker who attempted to slander her, often in outrageous ways.

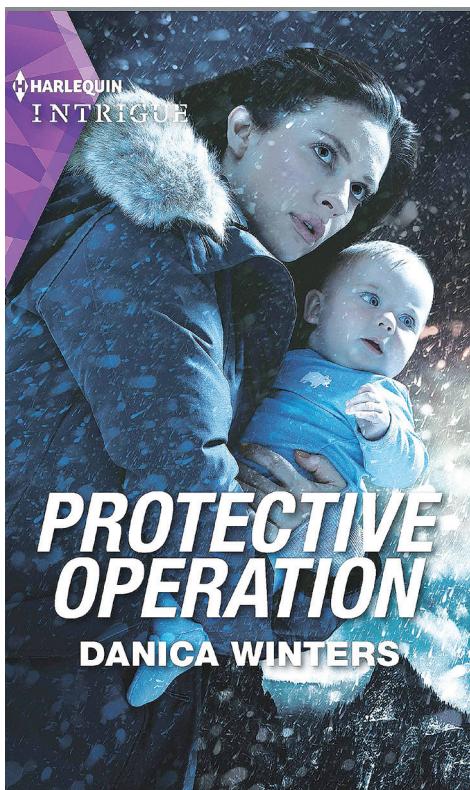
"It was bad and it was ugly and it was expensive," she admits. "They were pulling stuff from my books and trying to discredit me. I had death threats on email. I did get a restraining order and I just settled because it would have gone on and on and on."

Through it all, Winters not only knocks out four to five books a year, she also serves as business director for Self-Publishing Services, a Missoula-based self-publishing house she created with editorial director Clare Wood.

As usual, all of her future Harlequins will be set in Montana and feature female characters her grandmother could only dream about.

"I'm proud to be reinventing this genre in a way that puts women and women's rights and the right to choose in the forefront," Winters says. "As a brand, Harlequin definitely still has that feel to it sometimes; that older generation of writers who are still writing those kinds of soft, demure female characters. I have such a moral animosity toward that. I stick to my guns on very few things, but power women are something that I do and will constantly, forever write, because I am one!" ★

—JAY MACDONALD



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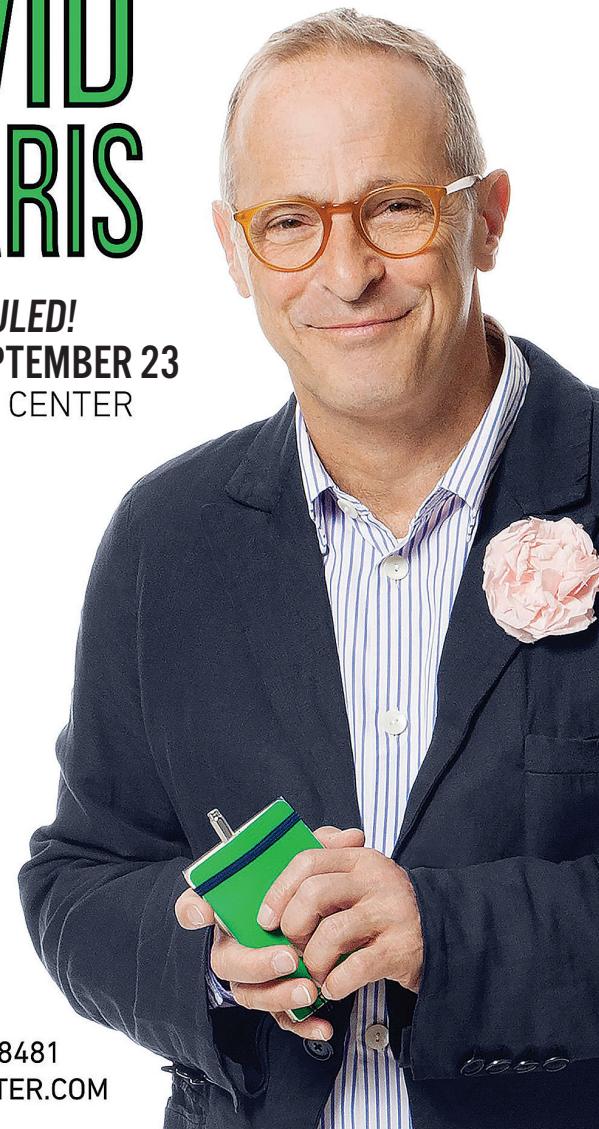


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ART PAGES: C.M. RUSSELL MUSEUM

A Printed Exhibit of Iconic Work from within the Walls of the Renowned Museum in Great Falls



The Jerkline

1912, oil on canvas. Collection of the C.M. Russell Museum; Gift of Fred Birch.

The jerkline is the line from the left leader to the jerkline man riding the nigh wheel horse, which controlled the movement of the entire team. The wagonmaster in this painting is one of Russell's favorite old-timers Johnny Matheson, who operated a freighting company out of Great Falls; the painting depicts his outfit coming up the hill from the Missouri River near Fort Benton. His jerkline outfit consisted of 14 horses, three wagons, and a car. Born in 1849 in Wallacetown, Ontario, Matheson had the traditional fierce temper and profane tongue of a freighter. He was a bachelor and not entirely "house-broken"—at least, he was intimidated by the presence of ladies (though he had five sisters) and found the strain of trying to balance a tea cup on his knee while keeping up his end of a polite conversation too much to bear. At the same time, he was a well-read, self-taught philosopher, kind to children and big-hearted in his own guarded fashion. Russell treasured Matheson's rough-hewn ways, his wealth of experience, and especially his stubborn resistance to the changes that eventually forced him to retire from freighting in 1909.

CHARLES MARION RUSSELL (1864–1926) was many things:

consummate Westerner, historian, advocate of the Northern Plains Indians, cowboy, writer, outdoorsman, philosopher, environmentalist, conservationist, and not least, artist. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Russell dreamed of becoming a cowboy and living the exciting life of men on the range. In 1880, Russell came to the Judith Basin of central Montana a few days after his 16th birthday to try his hand as a cowpuncher.

In 1896, Russell married Nancy Cooper, and she quickly assumed the role of business manager and promoter of her husband's career. In 1900, the couple built a modest frame house in Great Falls and, three years later, a log studio that Russell filled with his collection of Indian clothing, utilitarian objects, weapons, cowboy gear, "horse jewelry," and other Western props useful in depicting scenes of the Old West. Russell completed the majority of his significant works in the studio.

Russell created approximately 4,000 works of art during his lifetime. His art is first and foremost that of a storyteller, and it was informed by his remarkable ability to capture in paint, bronze, ink, and wax the personalities and events of his time and place. He was the first "Western" artist to live the majority of his life in the West. For this reason, Charlie knew his subject matter intimately, setting the standard for many Western artists to follow.

Today, the C.M. Russell Museum Complex in Great Falls fills an entire city block and encompasses 65,000 square feet of exhibition galleries and educational programming spaces. The museum complex includes the Russells' original house and studio, a National Historic Landmark, as well as over 13,000 pieces of art, ephemera, photographs, and archival material.





The Exalted Ruler

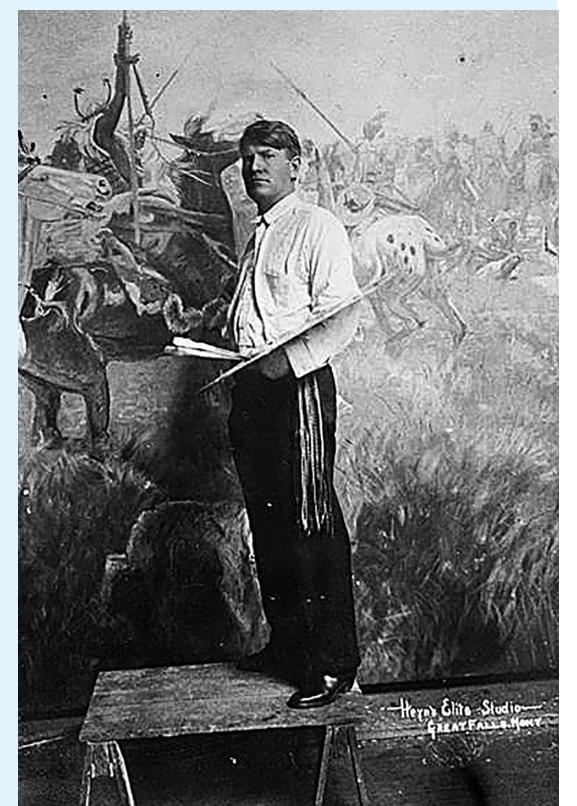
1912, oil on canvas. Collection of the C.M. Russell Museum;
Gift of Friends of the Exalted Ruler.

Russell was made an honorary lifetime member of the Elks Lodge of Great Falls in 1908, and happily accepted as so many of his old-time acquaintances were members of the Elks. The Elks dedicated a new temple in 1912 and asked Russell if he would contribute something for the building. The result was this painting which hung in the Elks Lodge in Great Falls until 1985. The painting, inscribed, "To My Brothers," with the artist's customary signature and buffalo skull trademark, is considered to be one of Russell's masterworks. The historical significance of The Exalted Ruler painting lies in the relationship of Russell with the Great Falls Elks Lodge and its subsequent importance to the people of Great Falls and Montana.

After the 1912 request that Russell contribute something to the new lodge, Russell replied with his typical nonchalance, leaving everyone in doubt as to his intention. But, as the story goes, one day Russell produced a roll of canvas, which he tossed on the table. It was the famous painting "The Exalted Ruler." Russell's storytelling ability can be seen in this painting in that it depicts a large elk in the foreground as the exalted ruler (also the title of the elected head of an Elks Lodge), the elk walking up the hill on the right as the ruler to be, and the one walking away on the left the past ruler.

Charles M. Russell in his studio, Great Falls, Montana.

He is posed with the painting "Lewis & Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole" (1912) now displayed in the House chambers of the Montana State Capitol Building in Helena. From the Montana Historical Society Research Center. For more information, visit mhslibrary@mt.gov.



WWW.CMRUSSELL.ORG

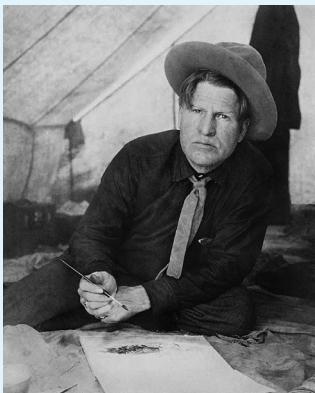
Last Chance or Bust

1900, watercolor

Collection of the C.M. Russell Museum;
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Stephenson

The painting deviates from Russell's usual subject. He often portrayed the life of the cowboy, as well as Native Americans and wildlife, but the portrayal of white settlers is a theme that is not in his usual repertoire. Russell often bemoaned the fact that the West was changing with the onslaught of farmers and the end of the open-range. This subject, however, predates the open-range cowboys of Montana. The settlers in this painting appear to be moving down the Mullen Road from Fort Benton to Helena and are near the end of their trek. In the background on the left side you can see the Scratch Gravel hills that are about four miles north of Helena.

Russell paints a watercolor in his tent at the Pablo Buffalo Roundup in this M.O. Hammond photograph taken on May 25, 1909. Gilcrease Museum, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma, www.gilcrease.org.



WWW.CMRUSSELL.ORG



The Fireboat

1918, oil on board. Collection of the C.M. Russell Museum; Gift of Mrs. Wade George in memory of Wade Hampton George

In 1903 and 1904, Charlie and Nancy Russell spent a considerable amount of time in New York City. While there, the self-taught artist came into contact with, and befriended many notable artists—an effort that proved to be a wise investment. Russell had expressed a desire to learn to “lay on color” and “have a chance to study this in some good studio.” A comparison of his paintings prior to the visit with those after 1904 indicates that he indeed had learned how to “lay on color.”

Artistically speaking many scholars consider the paintings from 1904 to roughly 1920 to be his finest pieces.



Beauty Parlor

1897, watercolor. Collection of the C.M. Russell Museum, Gift of the Bill and Betty Richardson Family in memory of Burdick and Julie Richardson.

Many consider this watercolor to be one of Russell's masterworks. In no other Russell painting of the Northern Plains Indians has he so eloquently expressed the serenity and dignity of American Indian life. This interior scene shows two people on an animal skin rug engaged in a universal domestic activity. Russell further accentuates the intimacy by placing the viewer within just a few feet of the couple. On the floor is a parfleche bag, most likely made of rawhide and painted with geometric designs by Indian women to carry their personal and household possessions from one place to another. John C. Ewers, ethnologist emeritus of the Smithsonian Institute, found this work intriguing, noting that this was the only illustration he had found of a Plains Indian using an implement known as a "hair parter."

"Beauty Parlor" is evidence of Russell as both a master watercolorist and chronicler of American culture.

C.M. RUSSELL MUSEUM While many public and private exhibits and museums are closed to the public as of May 2020, these organizations and entities have an extensive presence online and will need support from friends of the arts going forward.

Since 1953, gifts and bequests of art and artifacts and donations of money have enabled the C.M. Russell Museum to grow. Donations of goods and services in kind from businesses and corporations have been especially valuable for capital development. Some gifts may also establish a lasting memorial of cultural and educational value for years to come.

The C.M. Russell Museum is a qualified 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and any gifts or donations are deductible within IRS regulations.

A donation to the museums helps the Western art community continue to grow, thrive, gain new audiences and improves the research accessibility and discovery of Western art. Visit www.cmrusell.org for more information.



WE RECOMMEND...

STATEWIDE MUSICIAN LISTINGS

Online Events across Montana on Facebook, YouTube & More

The monthly calendar is a sampling of events and activities online across the state. Please send updates to: info@montanapress.net.



EL WENCHO COMMUNITY

Travis Yost of El Wencho launched “El Wencho Community” which is described as “An entity for us and our road family. The folks that have had our backs. The folks that need support. The folks that need someone. The folks that need an ear or a voice.” The new group, which can be found on Facebook at the handle [@elwencho](https://www.facebook.com/elwencho) and at “El Wencho” on YouTube, touts the motto: “When Life Happens, Music Unites.” The pages feature “Quarantine Cocktail Hour” concerts, sharing of live music sessions and uploaded, recorded shows. Travis Yost also offers Zoom-based songwriting lessons.



THE PTESSERACT

Missoula musician Sean Howard Burrell offers his facebook fans live eclectic music shows every Monday at 9 p.m. through his streaming handle [@seanhoward888](https://www.facebook.com/seanhoward888). Sometimes dressed up in Pokemon costume, other times wearing dress shirt and tie, the shows are a blend of improvisation and composition.



ARTERIAL DRIVE PRESENTS REGULAR LIVESTREAM ROCK AND ROLL CONCERTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE GROUP AT THE FACEBOOK HANDLE [@ARTERIALDRIVE](https://www.facebook.com/arterialdrive).



BIG SKY DRIVE

Featuring Layloni and Slim from America’s Liquor Down Band, Big Sky Drive showcases light rock, pop, dance and sing-a-long favorites. Online shows are uploaded regularly on Facebook at [@bigskydrive](https://www.facebook.com/bigskydrive).

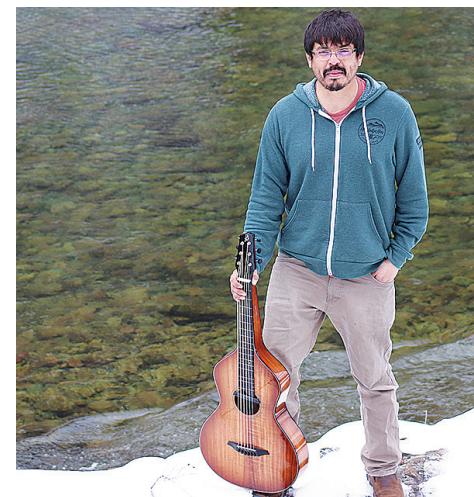


JESSICA EVE

Voted best Female Vocalist in the Magic City Music Awards in Billings two years in a row, Jessica Eve has featured videos uploaded on her Facebook site at the handle [@jessicaeveMTmusic](https://www.facebook.com/jessicaeveMTmusic)



TEXAS MUSICIAN AND SINGER/SONGWRITER BO DEPEN UPLOADS HIS OWN AMERICANA/COUNTRY AND SHARES WORK BY OTHER MUSICIANS ON HIS FACEBOOK HANDLE [@BODEPENA](https://www.facebook.com/bodepena) AND HIS WEBSITE WWW.BODEPENAMUSIC.COM.



DAN DUBUQUE

Experimental musician Dan Dubuque plays a mix of original and cover songs on a Weissenborn Slide Guitar. The eclectic musician also rocks out on the Ukulele, Charango, and Electric and Acoustic Guitar. Dubuque grew up in Polson and performs across Montana. He updates his music regularly on Facebook [@dandubuemusic](https://www.facebook.com/dandubuemusic) and check out the video “Dude Slays Rage Against the Machine Medley on a Slide Guitar in the Snowy Woods” on www.metalsucks.net.



TEN YEARS GONE

This classic rock, alternative, and pop dance band are multiple winners of the Helena Independent Record “Best Of Helena” Best Band Category. They are releasing a collaboration of music on Facebook in early May at [@thetenyearsgoneband](https://www.facebook.com/thetenyearsgoneband).



WHERE THERE’S A WILL, THERE’S A WAY!

Montana Shakespeare in the Parks (MSIP) is streaming to living rooms across Montana and beyond. In keeping with their mission, all performances are completely free. Every two weeks on Friday nights at 7 p.m. via a Facebook Premiere, MSIP will show recent plays.

Friday, May 1 - “Twelfth Night”

Friday, May 15 - “You Never Can Tell”

The plays will also be online for 24 hours before they go back into the vault. For info, visit www.shakespeareintheparks.org or Facebook handle [@montanashakespeareintheparks](https://www.facebook.com/montanashakespeareintheparks).



DOJA

A fusion band mixing hip hop lyrics with several different styles from rock to reggae, funk to metal. Check out Facebook Live shows [@dojaexperience](https://www.facebook.com/dojaexperience).

MONTANA MUSICIANS WEATHER THE LOCKDOWN STORM

Cancellations and closures nationwide have touched nearly every American's life as they adjust to a new normal. Like many others in the Montana community, local professional musicians have faced massive changes to their lifestyle and vocation due to COVID-19 but are adapting to the unprecedented time.

Christy Hays, country folk musician and Butte resident, was in Texas during her annual pilgrimage to perform in the South when she started to realize all her upcoming shows were getting canceled. By mid-March, her schedule completely cleared. Shocked, Hays made her way home to Montana and quarantined herself for two weeks. She says the Butte community came together to help out right away.

"It was so unexpected and quick. I had a lot of irons in the fire with music, but everything ground to a halt," Hays says. "So many people in Butte offered to help out when I got home. It's the nature of the community."

Hays took to online channels to continue performing and sharing her music. On March 27, Hays held a concert online using Facebook Live and Instagram Live. She had backup from her Dad for half of the hour-long performance. She says it went well and many people tuned in; "I think I'll do it again."

Hays says she normally performs over two hundred times every year nationwide, and plays all over Montana in venues including breweries, bars, and distilleries. Originally from rural central Illinois, Hays has lived all over the country but landed in Butte, Montana about 13 years ago when a close friend moved into town.

"I was tired of living in cities, so I bought a house in Butte. I just really love Montana," Hays says. "I love the people in Butte. It's the best community I've ever found."

Hays says she misses the sense of community and collaboration with artists she had before the COVID-19 pandemic. Not having the same opportunities to perform live, however, takes Hays back to her roots as a musician.

"I miss connecting with the audience. It makes me want to continue to be a performer and feel like my music made a difference in someone's day. I think in the end I'll come out more creative and excited to perform," Hays says.

Hays draws from other hardships in her life to stay grounded during the pandemic. Five years ago, in August of 2015, Hays had to stop playing music due to the contraction of the rare bone disease, Kienbock's Disease. Her left hand was immobilized because a bone at the fulcrum of her wrist stopped getting blood flow and died. When she was finally diagnosed, the disease was so advanced doctors told her she might no longer be able to play guitar. In November 2015, Hays underwent a bone graft. A Billings surgeon took bone marrow from her hip to repair the hand, and she was able to perform live the following summer.

"During this time, I've moved into being thankful for my health and my family's health. I'm not worrying so much about the unknown and about all my plans falling through, because when I came out of all those surgeries and still had the use of my left hand, that's all I wanted," Hays says. "Health is so important and you can always rebuild."

Hays is not the only Montana musician



adapting to the massive cultural shift taking place to prevent COVID-19 spread. Tom Catmull, songwriter and Missoulian who performs an eclectic mix of country, folk, rock and more says his upcoming summer shows mostly have been canceled.

"Once that happened, it felt like we're all floating unattached to everything," Catmull says. "I realized the online thing was the only way for a little while."

Catmull says he quickly learned Facebook Live and bought a USB mic to start performing a weekly online virtual show dubbed, "Concerto con Cactus." Every Thursday at 7pm Catmull sits with his guitar in front of his phone for about an hour streaming live. He's done that for about five weeks. In the background sits an electric cactus from Albertson's he bought for his wife on Valentine's Day; "I thought I should add something other than just myself playing guitar."

Catmull says his weekly audiences have pulled hundreds of viewers, some even watching from outside Montana. He plans to continue playing virtually even once communities start to open back up.

"I'm just sitting on my phone in my living room. It's all kind of crazy but it keeps you busy," Catmull says. "It's hard to find the upside of a global pandemic, but it's in some ways pushing me out of the box and inspiring me to change the way I do things."

While both Hays and Catmull put on their own performances using their Facebook page and virtual tip jars such as Venmo, other musicians are performing online with partnerships with local organizations.

On Facebook, the "Haufbrau Open Mic (The Pandemic Sessions)" page allows amateur musicians an opportunity to share the music they're creating through pre-recorded posts or live stream. Similarly, the "Explore Big Sky" Facebook page is hosting regular shows called the "Friday Night Club" featuring local musicians such as Paige & The People's Band, a soul, rock, jazz, folk, and pop group from Bozeman. ★

—GENEVA ZOLTEK

Montana Press sponsors "Montana Happy Hour" featuring Christy Hays on Facebook Live on May 14 at 5 p.m. at @MontanaPress and a Zoom party at the same time. RSVP to the zoom event at info@montanapress.net.

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OUT & ABOUT

FRED EAGLESMITH CARRIES ON JOHN PRINE'S TROUBADOUR TRADITION

Canadian singer-songwriter Fred Eaglesmith has toured exhaustively over his illustrious career. From riding the rails and playing every nook and cranny of Canada, Eaglesmith has made a living penning finely-crafted songs and winning fans over, one venue at a time. Recently, Montana Press spoke with Eaglesmith about how musicians are coping with the coronavirus crisis, his songwriting talents and his affinity for the late, great John Prine. (Note: Prine passed away on April 7, a week after this interview was completed.)



MONTANA PRESS: How have you been spending the time the last few weeks, given the COVID-19 situation?

FRED EAGLESMITH: Well, we quit the tour a month ago. We were ahead of the curve a little bit. Then we went to Florida for a week and a half before it hit and things got bad. We had our first holiday in 10 years and then we threaded the needle through America back home.

MP: What's the best way fans can support musicians during this time?

EAGLESMITH: I don't really know. I have a little rainy-day money put away, so I'm one of the lucky ones. I don't really think I'm in the same level of business as other pop artists. In my mind, this is what we do, it's hard. It's like being a coal miner in terms of the pay sometimes.

MP: How have you evolved as an artist from when you first started, to where you are today?

EAGLESMITH: When I started in my early teens I was very interested in becoming well-known. That went away, and it became more about leaving a song behind that other people will sing, that will bring other people joy. It's good to leave that behind even if they don't know I wrote it. Just leave a great song behind you when you leave this world, and hopefully I'll have left one or two of those.

MP: What can fans expect at the Montana shows, scheduled for June?

EAGLESMITH: It's just my wife (Tif Ginn) and I. We are really interested in entertaining people and making them happy and putting on a high-quality show for them. Our show has evolved more; it's a little more musical than it was four years ago. We've become a little better at it. Right now, we're having a really good time with our show.

MP: Do you have any fond memories or funny anecdotes about performing in Montana?

EAGLESMITH: I have one of the funniest stories, and it happened just a few years ago, but I forget the name of the town. We were playing in Montana and we were going up to Alberta and we got a call to come and play this town. The money wasn't great but it was on the way. Except they forgot to mention they were 8000 feet up, and I was in my old bus. The bus was going 15 miles an hour forever going up this frigging hill.

So we get up there, and it's a complete town party and there are cover bands. And everybody's drunk. We're going to be on at five o'clock. But at five o'clock, it's not even close. Then it was six, then seven, then eight. Finally, we get on stage, we got original music but slowly we're winning them over. Suddenly, this woman comes up to the stage and says, 'This is the last song. I want you to get off the stage.'

We've only been on 25 minutes. So I got off the stage. It turned out the cover band playing behind us gave them the ultimatum. 'Either get them offstage or we're not going to play.' So we got back in the bus and drove down the other side of that mountain. It was one of the weirdest experiences I had in my life.

MP: I read an interview of yours regarding John Prine performing on The David Frost Show and how influential he was. Did you have a chance to meet him or perform with him?

EAGLESMITH: No. I've not reached out or made an effort to. When I was a kid and I was in my teens, I studied John Prine like a colt running beside the big horse. I ran around that track and I played all of his songs. I left home and I hitchhiked across Canada playing songs and hopping freights and playing John Prine songs because I didn't have very many of my own. The ones I did have weren't very good. I did that for a while, and then I started writing better songs. I wrote songs based on what I had learned from John Prine songs. Not only what I had learned based on his writing, but how he delivered it, how he was so poignant. I never forgot that. I never forgot what a great teacher he was.

MP: What do you think is his greatest strength?

EAGLESMITH: First of all, he's absolutely brilliant. He's gifted and by gifted, I mean I worked at it for years and years to get any kind of credibility, but he did it in a very short time. He did it on a dare basically. Some people write songs for the times. His stood the test of time, they are as relevant now as they were back then. ★

—JASON MACNEIL

Fred Eaglesmith's tour is tentatively scheduled with performances set for Billings at the Pub Station on June 19, 2020 and in Bozeman at the Filling Station on June 20, 2020.

SEQUESTERFEST: ONLINE FESTIVAL BRINGS MUSICIANS AND FANS TOGETHER

Nina Shyne Alviar's sisters taught her to sing a three-part harmony to the Beatles in her kitchen. She laughs that she's always been a legend while singing in her car. But it wasn't until recently that Shyne Alviar found her voice on the stage.

"Music has always been a big part of my life. But being able to perform is a new thing," Shyne Alviar says.

Alviar and her partner Don Teschner have been performing their funk, blues and Americana tunes in their hometown of Missoula, and beyond, for the past year. Teschner's dynamic music history includes world-touring with the Rod Stewart Band.

Alviar and Teschner quickly made momentum and found their groove in the Montana music scene but all came to an abrupt halt recently with the social-distance requirements that have been put in place in an effort to protect the public from the Covid-19 virus.

Before long, however, Alviar came up with an idea to support her community of musicians.

"I noticed Travis Yost was streaming live music. I was watching and he had his Venmo tip jar. I thought it was great he was doing that. Then I started noticing all of these other individual musicians doing live-streams," she says.

She says she woke up the next morning and thought, "How can I help these musicians get more tips and attract more followers to their web pages? What if we do something to make an event out of it?"

"It just popped in my head: 'Sequesterfest.' We could do a live-stream festival!"

She started putting the online music festival together, figuring out how to bring people to each artist's Facebook page, and registering "Sequesterfest" as a business name. She contacted her fellow musicians from Missoula and invited them to take part in this unique online music festival.

The first Missoula Sequesterfest featured 14 acts over a 12-hour span on March 28th. Artists could see who was watching, and fans could interact and say hi to each other during the performances. The Montana-based online music festival attracted more than 13,000 combined views and raised thousands of dollars in combined "tips" for the musicians.

"The Missoula show was so much fun," says Alviar. I had no idea what it was going to be like. Nobody was doing anything like that yet. I used it as a grand experiment. The feedback keeps coming from viewers and musicians



Performer Travis Yost (left), and organizer Shyne Alviar and her partner Don Teschner (right).



about how much they enjoyed 'going' to a special event. It gave them a sense of connection and community."

Alviar participates in every single performance by posting links to the shows, "passing the hat" for tips in the comments and helping direct people to the next musician. She says the Missoula-based festival was so successful that she subsequently has organized a Sequesterfest West and a Sequesterfest U.S.

Travis Yost was the first musician to take part in the first Sequesterfest. The Missoula-based artist tours around western Montana performing primarily at breweries. He relies on the income to pay his bills. As a result, the quarantine hit Yost hard.

"I had a gig on March 8. That was the last public gig I played," Yost says.

Yost lost 10 gigs in a period of a week in early March while the quarantine was going into effect, and eventually all 25 performances he had lined up throughout March, April and early May were canceled.

"I had zero options to play any gigs outside my house," he explains. But that didn't stop Yost from playing music. He has been live streaming his music from his house daily.

"I'm switching to live-stream gigs just for my emotional state," Yost says. "There's an ongoing joke with my friends and family that if I'm not playing music I'm a terrible person."

"Sequesterfest isn't only a way for musicians to make a little bit of income while they are sequestered at home. It's also a way to connect with fans and other musicians during a time of uncertainty," Alviar explains.

"We miss playing because of the income, yes, but it's more about feeding our souls. We can't wait to hug our fans and say hi in person. If we are unable to perform, we don't know who we are," she says. "Having an outlet to be able to do that is really important right now, for all of us."

Yost says he was very happy to be part of the first Sequesterfest.

"It felt really good. And as close as you could be to being part of a festival," he says. "People who might not get the views they would get on their own got good numbers – including the people who were scared to do it."

Yost says live-streaming music is different from performing for a live audience, not only because of the technical aspects of performing for the camera, but also because social media can be cruel.

"There's a fear of permanency and definitely a microscope that is happening," he says. "In a venue you can get away with a lot more. Now, there is weirdly an extra amount of pressure - people can watch it forever."

Yost says while there will always be 'trolls,' and people who like to point out mistakes, after you do a live-stream once or twice the experience gets better. And the casual vibe associated with Sequesterfest allows musicians to perform online in a welcoming environment, Alviar says.

"What I love about it is it's so relaxed. You are in these musicians' living rooms with them. Cats will walk into the picture. They will leave for a second to grab something and come back," she says.

Alviar says she strives not only to attract well-known musicians to Sequesterfest; she also invites up-and-coming artists to participate. The third festival featured a mix of Grammy winners, familiar musicians and up-and-coming artists from all over the country including Pennsylvania, Texas, Montana, Hawaii and California.

"You would be surprised; even the more established musicians are hurting right now because they aren't doing live shows. Also, some are going to donate their tips to a cause they want to donate too. Other musicians will be using that money to go to the grocery store or pay a bill."

Jeff Kossack is a Los Angeles-based musician who participated in Sequesterfest West. He says he thinks supporting musicians is important now more than ever. "There is value seeing that music will soothe us," Kossack says. "I think there is going to be a renewed look at how arts are looked at and funded."

Shyne Alviar agrees. "If you think about it, what are we all turning to at this time when we are all sequestered? We are turning to music and movies and art," she says. "It helps drive home that it's important to support musicians. It is a real job and it's providing a big service for society as a whole."

Sequesterfest will continue to be held until it's safe for musicians and audiences to come together. At that time, Alviar says she'd love to bring together Sequesterfest artists for an in-person festival. The next live-stream Sequesterfest show is scheduled for May 9. Links from the previous Sequesterfests are still available online. ★

—BREEANA LAUGHLIN



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ADAPTATION: THE LIFE AND ART OF JOHN FLORIDIS

Dropped cold-turkey into the middle of an incredibly traumatic and dynamic historic moment—the age of Covid-19—Missoula singer-songwriter John Floridis is adjusting to a different life in the age of social and cultural restriction.

“Like everyone else I have had to adapt,” says Floridis. “I had about five performances in the six days leading up to the Monday where everything hit the fan. During the last few performances, things were getting super cautious, and as the week went on, there were questions about the gigs, and each succeeding day a little more concern about close contact, and it started having an effect on people going out... Businesses started adhering to policies to get ahead of the curve and work disappeared. It was a strange sensation to see that happen.”

Professional working musicians such as Floridis hate removing performance dates off of their calendars, but in a time of national emergency, he has made peace with the precautionary timeline.

“There is no sense in getting upset about it because it’s happening to everyone. Being self-employed, there is the basic financial need that we are dealing with, and needing to meet. I am fortunate enough to have room left on my contract to produce on the radio show.”

John interviews traveling musicians for an in-depth, hour-long program called Musician’s Spotlight, which broadcasts on Montana Public Radio and in the midst of a changing environment, Floridis is familiarizing himself with the modified role of music as a response to a critical moment.

“There is live streaming, and I’ll be going with that, sticking a virtual tip jar out there through Venmo and PayPal, and relying on that. For someone who plays music consistently, it’s so much a part of your identity. To me, it’s grounding to play music. So, even if it’s live streaming, at least I’m playing music at the end of the day.”

For decades, Floridis—a Missoula resident since 1993—has found nourishment in songs. Indeed, the robust scene in the city provides him with the reassurance that every night there’s another crack with light streaming through it.

“As a middle-aged soloist, it’s [the Missoula music scene] a good situation for me,” says Floridis. “Breweries, wine tasting rooms, distilleries, playing from 6 to 8 p.m. At 57, I don’t want to be out at 1:30 a.m. As a soloist,

the scene fits with what I do, even with the live looping thing at restaurants and breweries, and it fits for the tap rooms.”

As a professional musician in Montana, Floridis has long since had to be open to all kinds of situations to stay solvent, from brewery performances to non-profit benefits; in this, he says that the “intentional listening experiences” that he relishes are generally becoming harder to find in our culture. That’s unfortunate, because in such an environment Floridis is precious, a singer-songwriter who resonates with a calm, charming minimalism that showcases his elegance of language and achingly poignant melodies.

“When there is intentional listening, there is a whole other side of musicians you get to hear. I find that using electronics [live looping] to use a bigger sound, essentially a multi-track recording on the spot, works well in a live setting. I don’t go in there with pre-recorded things. You are creating stuff, almost like performance art, hitting the body of the guitar, creating a percussion sound, playing on top of that, recording some acoustic guitar, and switching to an electronic sound, or a lead, or whatever... There is a great energy that comes off of that.

“I’m trying to be a part of the room, with my energy present, and that energy engages people,” he adds. “Even if it’s not a pristine listening environment, art is happening. The more patrons, the more challenging it is to have that kind of experience. At times, someone will be deeply moved by what you were doing, though you will have no idea until afterwards. That’s what you have to look for in those circumstances.”

John Floridis’ relationship with music deepened three years ago following an aortic heart valve replacement. He returned to gigging approximately one month after he was fastened with a new bio-prosthetic regulator and given a clean bill of health.

“Your work is so much a part of your identity, and it was symbolic to get right back on the horse... it doesn’t ease all the concerns and stresses of putting yourself out at that level, but the surgery was a great perspective giver. There is a different flow that I found coming out of that. It’s not a cure-all for everything, but surviving open heart surgery has left me with a deeper appreciation of the connections of music and how you can engage people.”

A night with John Floridis is a like watching a book falling open in your lap; you’re



dropped into a narrative already in motion, sliding smoothly between the sacred and the sensuous. Skillfully, he provides enough detail so that people can feel invested, but not pinned firmly to the floor, his success a combination of sophistication and lack of pretension in both words and music.

“Whatever you put out into those (music) environments, you get it back, and you control how good you are...I’m always looking for this mix of light and dark. You could do that with a song that sounds lyrically intense, but is more musically uplifting. Or, it could go the other way around. That’s always there in my music, and I acknowledge it. You could get more inside of the lyrics in an intentional listening situation.”

Floridis says that he recently heard an interview with an Irish musician who discussed his role as “a community musician,” and that’s a term he likes, because it’s in step with his attitude and the attitude of a lot of other musicians in his community.

“When (Missoula singer-songwriter) Tom Catmull plays at a wedding, they’ve hired him because they wanted him—Tom Catmull, the person—to play music at their wedding. It was important to them. I take it very seriously when I play private events. It’s an honor because you are asking me to be myself. Even more so, since ninety percent of what I play is my own music. Valuing local musicians is very much a part of the state and Missoula in

general. [Montana country-Americana artist] Russ Nasset can be Russ Nasset until he falls into the grave and people are still going to dig him. There is a lot of be said for that.”

John Floridis’s music is not done by rote, but instead represents the declaration that he’s lived through another day. Under ordinary circumstances he plays about four shows per week, and there is nothing cliché about them.

In any case, there is a fresh new reopening ahead, and once the restrictions on freedom of movement and assembly are carefully lifted, we will be in desperate need of a new song, or better yet an old song from a familiar voice like John’s.

“For now, I think whatever modicum of normalcy we could get to at this point—like live streaming—is a good thing. It’ll be fascinating to see how this pandemic evolves as a culture, and how art evolves, too.”

In Floridis’s mind, music is best shared person to person in real time, and once the door has been nudged back open, fans can count on him to return to the road to deliver the essentials of his craft.

“There have to be at least 60-plus tap rooms across the state [to perform live music], and they just keeping popping up, especially on the Hi-Line. There is one now in Wibaux [Beaver Creek Brewery]. I’ll need to figure out how to get to all of those.” ★

—BRIAN D’AMBROSIO



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FAMOUS AND NOT FORGOTTEN: YODEL KING WYLIE GUSTAFSON



Wylie Gustafson was born in 1961, the youngest of five kids (all of whom arrived within a seven-year period) in a close-knit, tight-bonded family. His father, Rib Gustafson, a horse veterinarian and all-around horseman, instilled in his whole brood a love of rodeoing and ranching.

“Conrad, Montana, was my world,” recalls Wylie Gustafson, a 2020 inductee to the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame. “I grew up in that culture. And there is so much to do in this part of the country. Summer time, it was a little bit of everything, including our annual pilgrimage into the Bob Marshall (Wilderness) for six days on horseback, where we would go in for days without seeing another soul. We’d fish and goof off. Those are some of the most poignant memories I have growing up.”

In 1971, the Gustafsons purchased ranch property on the Two Medicine River, a tributary of the Marias River, and Wylie and his siblings found it to be the premiere location to wholly experience the outdoors, especially summer. Rib fly-fished way before it became cool. Fly-rod and a few baloney and bread sandwiches in tow, Rib and the kids would ride on horseback through the herds of livestock and settle in at the river. The clan would spend summer afternoons and evenings sprawled under the immensity of Big Sky blue and white.

There was another aspect of life to which Rib and his wife Patricia exposed the children: the oral, communal, and familial bonding provided by music. On weekends the Gustafson pack would huddle around the television and watch the Lawrence Welk show. When it concluded, Rib would promptly turn off the set, grab a Martin D-18 and croon a bunch of traditional cowboy and folk songs.

“Dad had a sense of humor, so he’d sing funny songs and offbeat folk songs. That’s where it started. Sundays in church, Mom would play the piano, and she would sing along with dad. It was our way of celebrating and spending family time. We were four brothers and one sister, and we’d dance and sing ‘Skip to My Lou’ with our sister. Rib had a unique taste in music, quirky old folk songs he loved to sing. I’ve never heard anyone else sing these songs but him.”

Such impressions weren’t lost on the Gustafson boys, specifically Wylie and Erik (aka Erik “Fingers” Ray), who formed a band in high school called the T-Birds, covering loads of Muddy Waters and Johnny Winters tunes, as well as the music of the day such as ZZ Top and the Rolling Stones and Beatles.

Recalls Wylie: “We decided that we’d go to college and go be a pop or rock band, and we figured that we could make money on the weekends doing it.”



After adding another member, Wylie and Erik played just about every weekend at various clubs in Missoula, even winning the “Battle of the Bands” at The Wilma two years in a row.

In the spring of 1981, the boys picked up an agent, who told them that if they (the foursome had reorganized as “The Time”) dropped out of college, there would be enough engagements to keep them busy full-time.

“Our first two weeks we were sent to the Winter Circle in Cut Bank,” says Gustafson. “The manager was an older lady who didn’t take any crap from bands, and I think our agent wanted to see if we could last two weeks there. If we could last two weeks there, we could most likely last a long time. From then on, we went six nights a week, four hours a night. Throughout the 1980s, I think we only had about three or four weeks off a year.”

In 1986 Wylie moved to Los Angeles to pursue a record deal and take the next leap; there was a band and a publicity stunt on every corner, so he reached back into his humble classic country roots and expended more time songwriting.

A quirky thought perhaps provided Wylie with his musical breakthrough while he lived in Los Angeles in the 1990s. Back in the days when Rib had taught him the brass tacks of horseback riding, the old man would yodel. Rib would yodel on the summit of the ski hill. He would yodel when he was at his happiest. As a kid, Wylie would yodel to mimic his father or to just be quirky or even to show off for his buddies. But one night at a club in one of the largest cities in the world, a country kid from north-central Montana yodeled once again. This time, he did it to capture the attention of a murmuring, distracted audience. It worked.



Wylie and his Brother Erik “Fingers” Ray formed a band in high school called the T-Birds, covering Muddy Waters and Johnny Winters tunes, as well as the music of the day, such as ZZ Top and the Rolling Stones and Beatles.

The band was such a success they were able to leave college and become professional musicians.

(Above) The brothers with their father Rib Gustafson at the Montana Folk Festival.

“LA people can be indifferent and burned out on so many bands, so I yodeled a song,” recalls Gustafson. “By gosh, they sat down their drinks and they actually listened. I realized the power of yodeling. Right afterwards, I met an old-timer who had a section of vinyl records of yodeling, and he pointed me towards it. From then on, I approached it as a serious art form – especially the fancy cowboy-style of yodeling.”

Wylie yodeled commercially for companies such as Mitsubishi, Miller Lite, Taco Bell, and Porsche, and by the time that a fledgling company named Yahoo! contacted him, he had already been rolling his vocal cords in such a manner for five years.

The session with Yahoo! in 1996 was over in perhaps 15 minutes and in about as many takes. It seemed like any other gig until the moment Wylie heard his bellowing voice during a Super Bowl commercial three years later.

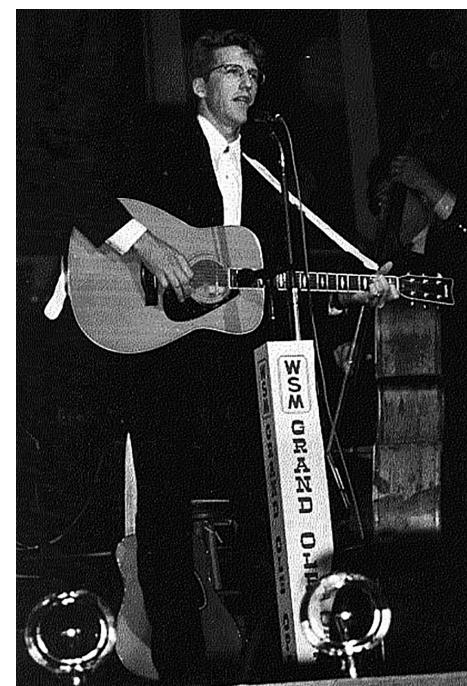
“It was kind of a shock for me,” recalls Gustafson. “It started off as a regional commercial and it became Yahoo’s audio logo and part of their email. They were pushing these ads out there worldwide. It was quirky enough and it worked with their ad campaign and their image, and the timing was just right.”

Public appearances yodeling at fairs and festivals followed, and Wylie even emceed an amateur yodeling contest that Yahoo! brought to eight cities nationwide as part of its promotional branding campaign.

“I’ve spent all of my life trying to write that three-minute classic country radio song,” chuckles Gustafson, “and it’s funny how life will make a fool out of you sometimes. Fame came not with the three-minute song, but with the three note song.”

After a successful run with Rounder Records, Wylie returned to Conrad in 2009, where he spent quality time with his aging parents. (Patricia died in 2012; Rib in 2014).

“Conrad has basically been reduced by half in population. The classrooms are now with 40 kids in them, and when we were in school, we had 80 classmates. The population has dwindled but the community still does all right.”



Wylie says that having such a rural base has left him with fewer gigs and corporate events, but that he is willing to compromise and sacrifice to help raise his three children in the same place where he fashioned his own character.

“I love the smallness of Conrad, the community, and the people,” says Gustafson. “It feels like home to me. I’ve traveled the world. But I really believe that Conrad has everything that I need.”

His Montana engagements take place in the teeniest of settings; yet these events often guarantee the most earnest connections.

“Two Dot hires us for its fire department fundraisers. We end up in these little communities, like at the Stanford Stampede (population currently less than 400; his mother, Patricia, grew up in Stanford). Ranch families come because we speak to them. We want the music to resonate with ranching and farming communities.” ★

—BRIAN D’AMBROSIO

Wylie Gustafson with his Father, Rib, learning the musical ropes at an early age.

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ARIES (March 21-April 19): I always hesitate to advise Aries people to slow down, be more deliberate, and pay closer attention to boring details. The Rams to whom I provide such counsel may be rebelliously annoyed with me—so much so that they move even faster, and with less attention to the details. Nevertheless, I'll risk offering you this advisory right now. Here's my reasoning, which I hope will make the prospect more appealing: If you commit to a phase in which you temporarily invoke more prudence, discretion, and watchfulness than usual, it will ultimately reward you with a specific opportunity to make rapid progress.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Is there an area of your life where you would like a do-over? A chance to cancel the past and erase lingering messiness and clear a path for who-knows-what new possibility? The coming weeks will be an excellent time to prepare—not to actually take the leap, but rather make yourself ready for the leap. You will have God and fate and warm fuzzy vibes on your side as you dare to dream and scheme about a fresh start. Any mistakes you committed once upon a time could become irrelevant as you fantasize practically about a future breakthrough.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): In 1855, Gemini-born Walt Whitman published his book of poetry *Leaves of Grass*. A literary critic named Rufus Wilmot Griswold did not approve. In a review, he derided the work that would eventually be regarded as one of America's literary masterpieces. "It is impossible to imagine how any man's fancy could have conceived such a mass of stupid filth," Griswold wrote, adding that Whitman had a "degrading, beastly sensuality" driven by "the vilest imaginings." Whitman's crafty Gemini intelligence responded ingeniously to the criticism. In the next edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the author printed Griswold's full review. It helped sell even more books! I invite you to consider comparable twists and tricks.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): In your efforts to develop a vibrant community and foster a vital network of connections, you have an advantage. Your emotionally rich, nurturing spirit instills trust in people. They're drawn to you because they sense you will treat them with care and sensitivity. On the other hand, these fine attributes of yours may sometimes cause problems. Extra-needy, manipulative folks may interpret your softness as weakness. They might try to exploit your kindness to take advantage of you. So the challenge for you is to be your generous, welcoming self without allowing anyone to violate your boundaries or rip you off. Everything I just said will be helpful to meditate on in the coming weeks, as you reinvent yourself for the future time when the coronavirus crisis will have lost much of its power to disrupt our lives.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Now is an excellent time to take inventory of your integrity. You're likely to get crucial insights if you evaluate the state of your ethics, your authenticity, and your compassion. Is it time to boost your commitment to a noble cause that transcends your narrow self-interest? Are there ways you've been less than fully fair and honest in your dealings with people? Is it possible you have sometimes failed to give your best? I'm not saying that you are guilty of any of those sins. But most of us are indeed guilty of them, at least now and then. And if you are, Leo, now is your special time to check in with yourself—and make any necessary adjustments and corrections.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): I predict that you will have more flying dreams than usual in the coming weeks—as well as more dreams in which you're traveling around the world in the company of rebel angels and dreams in which you're leading revolutionary uprisings of oppressed people against tyrannical overlords and dreams of enjoying eight-course gourmet feasts with sexy geniuses in the year 2022. You may also, even while not asleep, well up with outlandish fantasies and exotic desires. I don't regard any of these likelihoods as problematical. In fact, I applaud them and encourage them. They're healthy for you! Bonus: All the wild action transpiring in your psyche may prompt you to generate good ideas about fun adventures you could embark on once the coronavirus crisis has ebbed.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): It's time to work your way below the surface level of things, Libra; to dig and dive into the lower reaches where the mysteries are darker and richer; to marshal your courage as you go in quest of the rest of the story. Are you willing to suspend some of your assumptions about the way things work so as to become fully alert for hidden agendas and dormant potentials? Here's a piece of advice: Your fine analytical intelligence won't be enough to guide you through this enigmatic terrain. If you hope to get face to face with the core source, you'll have to call on your deeper intuition and non-rational hunches.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): When was the last time you researched the intricacies of what you don't like and don't desire and don't want to become? Now is a favorable time to take a thorough inventory. You'll generate good fortune for yourself by naming the following truths: 1. goals and dreams that are distractions from your primary mission; 2. attitudes and approaches that aren't suitable for your temperament and that don't contribute to your maximum health; 3. people and influences that are not in alignment with your highest good.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky believed that the cleverest people are those who regularly call themselves fools. In other words, they feel humble amusement as they acknowledge their failings and ignorance—thereby paving the way for creative growth. They steadily renew their commitment to avoid being know-it-alls, celebrating the curiosity that such blessed innocence enables them to nurture. They give themselves permission to ask dumb questions! Now is a favorable time for you to employ these strategies.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): What wonderful improvements and beautiful influences would you love to be basking in by May 1, 2021? What masterpieces would you love to have as key elements of your life by then? I invite you to have fun brainstorming about these possibilities in the next two weeks. If an exciting idea bubbles up into your awareness, formulate a plan that outlines the details you'll need to put in place so as to bring it to fruition when the time is right. I hereby authorize you to describe yourself with these terms: begetter; originator; maker; designer; founder; producer; framer; generator.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): If I asked you to hug and kiss yourself regularly, would you think I was being too cute? If I encouraged you to gaze into a mirror once a day and tell yourself how beautiful and interesting you are, would you say, "That's too woo-woo for me." I hope you will respond more favorably than that, Aquarius. In fact, I will be praying for you to ascend to new heights of self-love between now and May 25. I will be rooting for you to be unabashed as you treat yourself with more compassionate tenderness than you have ever dared to before. And I do mean EVER!

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): In the coming weeks, I'd love to see you get excited about refining and upgrading the ways you communicate. I don't mean to imply that you're a poor communicator now; it's just that you're in a phase when you're especially empowered to enhance the clarity and candor with which you express yourself. You'll have an uncanny knack for knowing the right thing to say at the right moment. You'll generate blessings for yourself as you fine-tune your listening skills. Much of this may have to happen online and over the phone, of course. But you can still accomplish a lot!

THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK:

What's the bravest thing you ever did?
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