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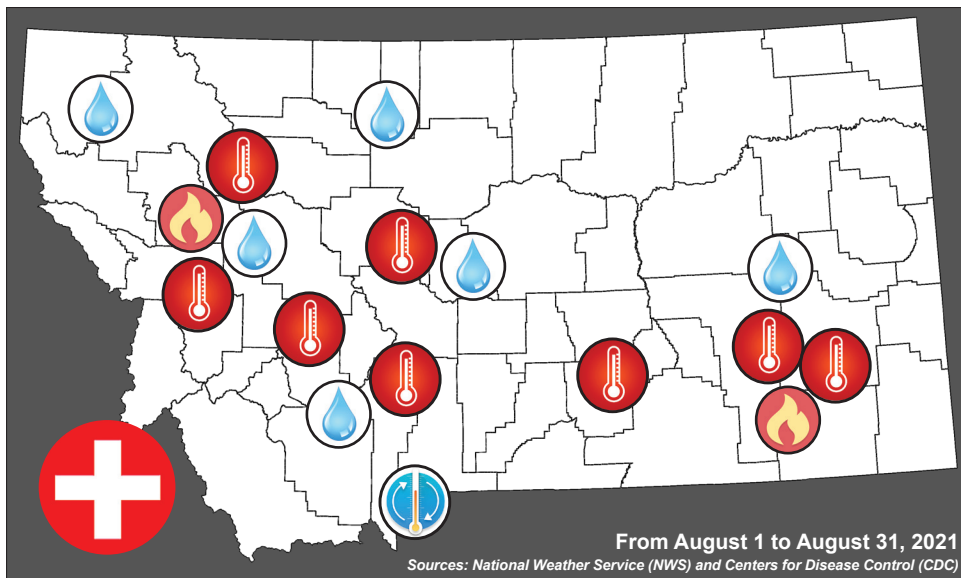
Vol. 4, Issue 9 • September 2021

MONTANA PRESS



MONTANA'S 25TH ANNUAL
TWO-SPIRIT
GATHERING

MONTANA ALMANAC



(Mostly) Highs and Lows Across the State



July was the world's hottest month ever recorded, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported. The data shows the combined land and ocean-surface temperature was 1.68 degrees above the 20th Century average of 60.4 degrees, the highest temperature since record-keeping began 142 years ago. The highest temperature in Montana for the August reporting period was 104 at Powderville on Aug. 16, tied with 104 degrees at Mizpah on Aug. 17. Days over 90 degrees (from June, July and through Aug. 13) included 46 days in Helena, 42 in Havre, 38 in Bozeman and 35 in Great Falls. For a six-week period leading up to Aug. 13, Helena broke its average high temperature at 94.1 degrees (last set in 2007). Over about half the meteorological summer has been at or above 90 degrees at Havre, Helena and Bozeman. On Aug. 15, Missoula tied a record with 98 degrees (2013) and Kalispell broke an old record of 97 degrees (2003) at a recorded 98 degrees. Billings broke a record with a temperature of 100 degrees on Aug. 16 (99 degrees in 2003). Cold temperatures hit the state on Aug. 24, with a low of 35 degrees reported in Great Falls, Lincoln reporting 29 degrees, Elk Park near Butte reporting 23 degrees and 21 degrees in the Bob Marshall wilderness at Gates Park, but no records were set. The lowest temperature for the period had been 32 at West Yellowstone on Aug. 9.

Record Precipitation



Thunderstorms on Aug. 1 and 2 brought over 1.06" of rain to the Valier area, which receives about 11.7" total of rainfall in a year. On Aug. 2, Ennis Airport received a quarter inch of rain in less than 20 minutes; another storm south of Seeley Lake produced 1.3" in 45 minutes. The .82" of rain that fell on the Montana State University campus on Aug. 2 tied the daily record set in 1911 and 1.64" of rain was recorded in a 24-hour period in Bozeman, with an additional 1.38" recorded in the following 24-hour period Aug. 3, when Neihart also reported 2.10" of precipitation, about 10% of its annual precipitation (21"). On Aug. 8, a slow moving thunderstorm brought over 1" of rain to some areas of the Rocky Mountain Front. On Aug. 8, over an inch of rain fell in 24 hours in parts of Glacier Park, the Upper Yaak, and Flathead Lake. On Aug. 18, Great Falls reported 1.62" of rain in 24 hours, which was more rainfall than occurred in all of June and July combined and is also the wettest period for Great Falls since 2020. Helena received .89" over the same reporting period, setting a record for their wettest 24-hour period in August since 2014. Frost warnings were issued Aug. 19 and snow was recorded in the high altitudes of some mountain ranges, including the Bitterroots and the Beartooths on Aug. 20. On Aug. 22, Miles City broke a precipitation record for the date with .46" of rain (.36" in 2002). Monsoonal moisture in areas in and around burn scars created greater risk for flash flooding and mudflows, including a mud slide on U.S. Highway 12 about 20 miles east of Townsend on Aug. 21.

Fire, Storms and Drought



100 percent of the state is experiencing extreme persistent drought with some areas of D4 classification of "Exceptional Drought" in northeast and southwest Montana. The last time the state was in such a drought was 2005. Fires burned structures at Flathead Lake early in the month and prompted an evacuation of Lake Deer on Aug. 10. Air quality ranged throughout the month from Moderate to Hazardous depending on local fire activity and fires burning across the country, especially large complexes in California and Idaho. In spite of thunderstorm activity that brought heavy rainfall to some areas early in the month, dry and gusty storms with lightening and hail swept over the state in the reporting period, sparking new fire starts and precipitating Severe Thunderstorm Warnings and Watches across the state. Red Flag Warnings remained in effect for much of the state through the month. Gusts of over 54 mph were recorded at the Helena Airport on Aug. 5, when Livingston also saw over 60 mph gusts. On Aug. 7, critical fire conditions were reported across the state, including gusts of near 50 mph near East Glacier. Winds of near 50 mph were also recorded on Aug. 8 in Broadwater, Madison, Beaverhead, Jefferson and Gallatin Counties. A 63 mph gust at Bozeman Airport on Aug. 17 was a record for the day and the highest August gust since 1995. A 69 mph gust at Dillon on the same day was the second-highest gust of record for August. Many fires, such as the Balsinger Fire in the Little Belts, were extinguished in the state by the end of the month but dangerous weather with high wind gusts and low humidity continued. A record wind gust of 79 mph occurred at Bozeman Airport on Aug. 31, breaking the record of 78 mph set on July 30, 1957. Find current fire information and local fire restrictions at MTFireInfo.org

Continuing COVID-19 Health Emergency



Montana is currently in the top ten states in the U.S. (no. 7) per one million population facing spiking cases of COVID. From Aug. 5 to Aug. 30, a total of 67 persons died of COVID and 518 were hospitalized in Montana. Montana continues to report high levels of community transmission and low rates of vaccinations, factors which result in high hospitalization and death rates from COVID around the country and around the world. Free vaccines are now available across Montana for anyone over 12 years old through local health departments and national pharmacy chains such as Albertsons, Wallgreens, CVS and Safeway. Visit Vaccines.gov for information.

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ON THE COVER Individuals from across the west came together to celebrate traditional Indigenous art and contemporary Queer culture this past August in Rollins, Montana, where the Missoula-based Montana Two-Spirit Society organized the 25th Annual Two-Spirit Gathering. The four-night event saw the return of workshops, pageantry, vendors, traditional singing and dancing and spirited conversation. *Photo by Mel Ponder.*

MONTANA PRESS MONTHLY

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MONTANA VOICES

Slipping Into Sweet September

We made it through August fellow Montanans, and luckily we got some rain and cooler temperatures to damp down the wildfires and clear the air. If our luck holds we may have a sweet September when the tourists go back to where they came from, the temperatures settle down to a more Montana-like range, and maybe, just maybe, we'll get some much-needed snow in the high peaks to bring hope to our dewatered and overheated rivers and streams.

The big news as we go to press is, of course, the end of America's longest war – George Bush's ill-advised invasion of Afghanistan in his ridiculous "global war on terror." They don't call Afghanistan "the place empires go to die" for nothing and sure enough, they can now add the U.S. to the long list of occupiers and would-be rulers who have ignominiously been driven from the country.

For those of us who opposed the war from the start, the ending is no surprise – after all, if the Mujihadeen could drive the ruthless Russians, with all their high-tech and steel-clad modern weapons of war, from their country, there was little reason to believe we would somehow fare differently. And we didn't. The great pity is the thousands of lives lost by the members of our armed forces, the hundreds of thousands of Afghans killed, the debilitating injuries with which so many returned, and the mental anguish of far too many who escaped physical injury only to be haunted by the horrors of war.

One of the strangest reactions to the war's end, however, has been the Republican Party's savage attacks on Joe Biden who, after all, only managed to do what their not-so-great leader Trump promised to do – which was end the war. If they really believed there was some less chaotic way to bring it to an end and evacuate Americans and their Afghan allies, they're not spending much time elucidating it – just more finger-pointing and rhetorical blame-gaming is what we get. Then again, Republican "leadership" has been more about looting the public domain than leading us through crisis now, hasn't it?

Here in Montana, where the GOP controls all statewide political offices, the near-total lack of leadership is painfully evident. Trapped by the foolish tenets of the former guy, Governor Gianforte has refused to issue a mask mandate – and in fact the GOP-dominated legislature made it nearly impossible for businesses to protect themselves, their employees, or their guests by making it illegal to do so.

Now, as our children go back to school, they are facing an onslaught of the Delta variant of Covid-19 that's more contagious and more lethal than the initial form of the pandemic. With no vaccine yet approved for those under 12, these politically-motivated, scientifically-challenged officials are putting the next generation's future in jeopardy so they can flaunt

the "freedom" of not having to use the simple protection of masks. Likewise, the "freedom" of the ignorantly unvaccinated puts the rest of us at significant risk and may well lead to another shutdown of our schools, businesses, and in-person government services.

If the GOP seems stuck in the past on Covid, it's clear they're doing no better on their approach to the ongoing crisis of climate-driven wildfires. Although current science has proved over and over again that logging does exactly nothing to stop wildfires under conditions of drought, high temperatures and wind, more deforestation is the prescription from both Governor Gianforte and Republican Senator Steve Daines. Trying to once again substitute casting blame for science-based leadership, these so-called "public servants"

are pointing their fingers at what they call "frivolous lawsuits" filed by "fringe environmental extremists" for holding up the deforestation they falsely claim would control wildfires.

But so far, the most notorious "frivolous lawsuits" in the U.S. are those launched by Trump's attorneys in their attempts to overturn the election. Daines and Gianforte are, of course, ignoring those – although a judge not only labeled them frivolous, but sanctioned the attorneys, charged them the costs the State of Michigan paid to defend against the meritless cases, and may wind up disbarring them from practicing law. That's what actually happens when lawsuits are "frivolous" – and there have been no such instances in Montana

over filing environmental lawsuits.

One might wonder where the Montana Democratic Party has been hiding while all this GOP mis-leadership is going on – and it would be a very, very good question. After having their heads handed to them in the last election and losing every statewide elected office to the Republicans, the Democrats basically bunkered up, and are for all intents and purposes haplessly invisible.

But as we were going to press the party released an announcement that they have hired Sheila Hogan as their new Executive Director. Not sure what particular skill set Hogan brings to run a political party, but perhaps her former position as the politically-appointed director of the Department of Public Health and Human Services will help her revive the moribund Democrats – and they certainly need reviving if they are to present any kind of a credible alternative to the on-going GOP disaster in Montana.

In any event, we'll see what happens and be back with you next month. In the meantime, enjoy September's harvest season, stay as safe as you can with the nutty anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers running around, and as always, hope for the best from the seriously challenged political leadership of the great state of Montana. ★

—GEORGE OCHENSKI

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BYGONE DAYS

Bygone Days are compiled from archives of Montana newspapers. Years featured: 1897, 1937 and 1962.

***The Fort Benton River Press*
September 1, 1897**

“Editing a newspaper is a nice business. If we publish a joke, people will say we are rattle-brained. If we publish original matter, they say we don’t give ‘em enough selections. If we give ‘em selections, we are too lazy to write. If we give a man a ‘puff,’ we are partial. If we compliment the ladies, the men are jealous. If we don’t, we are publishing a paper not fit to make a bustle of. If we remain in our office we are too proud to mingle with the common herd. If we are on the street, we are not attending to our business. If we wear good clothes we don’t pay for ‘em. Now, what shall we do? Some may say we stole this from an exchange—and we did.”

***The Dillon Tribune*
September 3, 1897**

“Three ladies were walking on a sidewalk on the east side, one of them carrying a sickle which she had purchased for her husband to cut grass with. They saw a bicyclist coming toward them on the walk, and as he neared them instead of dismounting he rang his bell. The lady who was armed with the sickle told the others to stand their ground, as it was the duty of the bicycle rider to dismount, and when he had approached near enough she called to him to do so, but he paid no attention and came right on. As he seemed determined to force his way by or over them the lady armed with the sickle brought it to the front, and with a drawing cut ‘punctured’ the tire on the fore wheel of the bicycle in a manner which released the compressed air with a rush. The bicyclist stopped and began to give his opinion on the matter, when the lady put a puncture in the tire of the hind wheel and then told the bicyclist he had better go on, as her sickle was sharp, and if he was uncivil she might try its effect on him. He went on.”

***The Virginia City Madisonian*
September 4, 1897**

“Fire Marshall Ed Reece of Helena is gritty. While hunting last week he was bitten on the finger by a rattlesnake. Fearing the poison would get into his system before he could reach medical assistance, he deliberately placed the bitten finger over the muzzle of the shotgun and pulled the trigger. The finger vanished. A physician who afterwards examined the wound, said it was cut off as nicely as if done with a surgeon’s knife.”

***The Anaconda Standard*
September 6, 1897**

“Yellowstone Lake Hotel, Yellowstone Park... Two men are under arrest at the Mammoth Hot Springs under suspicion of being the ones who held up six park coaches several weeks ago on the road leading from the Canyon hotel to the Norris geyser basin, and relieved the tourists in them of some \$800. The glory of the capture does not fall upon Col. Young’s shoulders, although he had more than 120 soldiers assisting him

in the case. The men now under arrest were trailed and captured by men other than soldiers... The suspects are well known in this vicinity and are best known as Little Gus and Morphine Charlie. While they claim they are innocent, the evidence against them is very strong. After the stage coaches were all robbed several shots were fired from a rifle held by one of the robbers, which was considered a signal for the coaches to drive on. After firing the shots the highwaymen threw the shells, throwing them into a clump of bushes near by. This was a fatal mistake for them, as those shells so far are the link which couples the men under arrest with the robbery... Those in one of the coaches saw the shells withdrawn and thrown away, and after the robbers had disappeared returned to the spot and found them. The shells proved to be of a 32-32 caliber, a peculiar size, and as far as known at the time, belonged to a gun owned by an outsider. These shells were turned over to Col. Young and will come as near as anything to fastening the crime upon the men under arrest.”

***The Fort Benton River Press*
September 8, 1897**

“Women Broncho Busters. They Furnish Entertainment at a Social Function in Havre, Mon. The Four Hundred of Havre, Mon., have just been figuring in a social function which will long be remembered. It was a broncho busting match. Not that there is anything unusual in this form of entertainment here, but on this occasion distinction was lent from the fact that it was women society leaders who busted the bronchos. It was a very select affair, and, not only that, but the broncho busting record was beaten by a wide margin.”

***The Virginia City Madisonian*
September 11, 1897**

“Mrs. Rose Flinn, a vivacious Helena widow, has left her two children in care of her mother and gone to the Klondyke.”

***The Whole Truth*
September 18, 1897**

“Saw An Air Ship. Roy Roads saw an air ship pass over the Great Eastern mine about 2 o’clock Sunday morning while at work on the surface. The whirl of buzzing noise above him is what attracted his attention and caused him to look up when he beheld in paralyzing astonishment the aerial ship

about 1,000 feet above him going almost due south and travelling as near as could be estimated about 60 miles an hour. Roy informs us that there was no lights on the ship that he could see unless in front for when he raised up to ascertain what caused the whirling noise the ship had passed over him and he only had a side view of the sky-scraping vessel. The young man was so affected by what he saw in the skies that when he was off shift instead of going to bed he came down to Castle and told his mother, Mrs. J. P. Rhoads, all about the queer aerial ship he saw sailing through the air. Roy Rhoads is a truthful, temperate and industrious young man and we believe he saw some kind of apparition or aerial object in the skies.”

***The Billings Gazette*
September 21, 1937**

“Woman Flyer Is Scheduled For Air Show. Bernardine King is Holder of Records for Trick Flying; Will Arrive Friday. There is air show scheduled Saturday and Sunday, added the name of Bernadine Lewis King, renowned stunt flyer who holds several national records in trick piloting, to the list of performers Monday.... Miss King will arrive in Billings Friday night from Hollywood, Cal. where she has been trick flying for motion picture companies when not attending air shows over the nation this summer. The famed woman pilot who holds the record for flying upside down will occupy a companion place on the program with Tex Rankin, international aerobatic champion, who also spends his spare time doing sky thrillers for motion picture concerns. Included in Miss King’s program here are slow rolls, half rolls, loops, snap rolls, double snap rolls vertical reversement ending in snaps, rolls in eight positions, vertical snap, flick consecutive, inverted dive, wing over, hammerhead Cuban figure eight...and other feats. She will also engage in the art of skywriting. Climax of her act will be a falling leaf, one wheel landing, and a take-off picking up a handkerchief with a wing tip.”

***The Fort Benton River Press*
September 22, 1937**

“Corn Measures Nine Feet. No pretense is made that from a standpoint of tall corn we can get into the controversy that recently raged between Illinois, Iowa and Arkansas when Arkansas finally produced a stalk of corn 18 feet and 9 5-8 inches tall, outdoing Iowa by 3 5-8 inches and leaving Illinois in the lurch. However, Big Sandy has an entry ready to compete with any other territory of like altitude and latitude. The exhibit, nine feet tall, is at the International elevator and was taken from the field of A.J. Cline west of Big Sandy.—Big Sandy Mountaineer.”

***The Billings Gazette*
September 26, 1962**

“Counterfeit Ring Hit by T-Agents. Missoula (UPI) Agents of the Department of the Treasury Tuesday night smashed what appeared to be the center of a multi-state counterfeiting ring headquartered in Missoula. A Missoula man was taken into custody and nearly \$40,000 in bogus \$20 bills plus printing supplies was seized. Missoula police indicated there were other suspects in the case, although treasury agents were tight-lipped. Arrested was 31-year-old Robert Duane Robinson. He was picked up as he got out of a car loaded with money near a warehouse on Missoula Southside Tuesday afternoon. He was arraigned before you ask commissioner JE Brody on a charge of ‘making, transporting and possessing counterfeit money.’...

Trout Creek Community 3rd Annual

TURKEY SHOOT

STARTING AT 10 A.M.

SUN., SEPT. 30

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(OPEN SIGHTS AND SCOPES)
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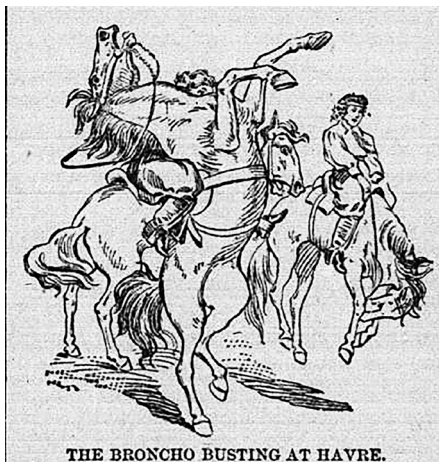
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FOR TURKEYS, HAMS AND CHICKENS
ALSO ALL DAY SUNDAY AT THE GYM
FOLLOW THE SIGNS AT T.C. ON 10A LUNCH SERVED ON GROUNDS

Norman Sheridan, of Spokane, special agent for the Treasury Department, said ‘obviously these stacks of queer money were made at Missoula and this appears to be the center of a multi-state counterfeiting operation.’ He said apparently none of the bills had been circulated in Missoula, but that some of the money had turned up in Spokane and Texas... Missoula Police Chief J.G. Lamoreaux and detective Dean Lockeridge made the arrest after getting a tip Monday night. They set up a stake-out most of Tuesday, watching for a certain car. When they stopped the suspect, the located four packets of \$20 bills wrapped in white cloth in the trunk of the vehicle. They said they also found photographic negatives of parts of \$20 bills... Two cans of ink were also located and Sheridan said it was ‘likely that the lithographic process was being used.’ All of the bills carried the same number but reporters examining them said they found it impossible to tell them from legal tender... It was also learned that a woman suspect, believed to be from Missoula, had been arrested two days ago in an unidentified large city for passing bogus bills, but officers declined any further details.”

***The Flathead Courier*
September 28, 1962**

“More Mystery on Monster Front; New Sighting Reported Near Polson. There’s more excitement on the monster front this week. The report by Maynard and Ronald Nixon of the sighting of strange aquatic object a couple Sundays ago has brought forth several more reports. Out of Missoula comes word from A.D. Bartlett and Mrs. Harry T. Petersen that they saw an object similar to that described by the Nixons off Rocky Point last July. The Daily Missoulian quoted Mrs. Bartlett as saying she and her sister were riding in a slow-moving boat when they saw an object about 100 feet away from the boat. ‘Neither of us spoke,’ Mrs. Bartlett said. ‘We just stared and then looked at each other. I concentrated on thinking it was a freak wave, but it wasn’t. It didn’t change at all as it moved, and it was jet black... I couldn’t say if it was a live animal. But it looked graceful. It had no fins and it didn’t undulate like a fish. I saw no sign of a head or tail. There was no sound. The lake was also dead calm and the thing made long, smooth waves.’ Also, this week came reports from a downtown businessman who asked that his name not be used. He sighted it about 2 1/2 weeks ago in the lake near the bridge. The description matched the Nixons’ version of the sighting, ‘fast moving, about 25 to 30 feet in length.’” ★

Bygone Days are compiled by Jen Eames.



THE BRONCHO BUSTING AT HAVRE.

MONTANA BOOKS

The Rowdy Romances of Author Susan Bliler



Avid readers of Great Falls rowdy-romance writer Susan Bliler treasure her fiction but they may be surprised to learn that the 44-year-old author’s own life has paralleled the 39 Amazon bestsellers she has self-published in the past nine years.

Like the signature chest-bearing covers of her ”Skin Walkers” and ”Territory,” Bliler, of White Clay/Nakoda and Scandinavian decent, is readily forthcoming about the struggles she faced growing up poor in the projects, and how she and her twin sister Cindy created a literary and commercial niche of their own, bearing her marketing name Alpha She. As Bliler’s readership grew, so did her website, which now sells not only her novels but signature apparel, housewares and even facemasks.

Montana Press spoke with Bliler just weeks before the publication of her first children’s book, ”Witches Stitches,” and following a harrowing two-years health crisis that included breaking her neck in a 2020 fall, removal of her gallbladder to control pancreatitis and colitis, and a bout with Covid-19.

MONTANA PRESS: First question: how are you feeling?

SUSAN BLILER: Good. It’s been a long year, I’m not gonna lie! (laughs) I’m just looking forward to things getting better now.

MP: Covid’s quite a handful, but it sounds like for you it wasn’t the worst hand you were dealt.

BLILER: Yeah, it really wasn’t. I was down basically for a week and I just slept. I was so exhausted. I felt like I hadn’t slept before in my life. Out of the broken neck and then the gallbladder surgery, I would have taken Covid over either one of those!

MP: And yet you’re still turning out new books!

BLILER: Yeah. Gotta work!

MP: It’s hard to fathom your literary shelf of 39 published titles in nine years. What was it like for you to launch your own fiction career?

BLILER: Well, I was a reader before I was ever a writer, and when you grow up poor and you don’t have anything and you don’t go on vacation, books are your life. They really were. It got to the point where we were so poor that my sister used to actually go and steal me books so that I could read. When we finished my first manuscript and she read it, she was like, ‘This is good,’ and I was like, ‘You know, I think this is good, too, because I read this all the time.’ So when we sent it to Harlequin (publishing) and they sent it back and said there was no audience, I was instantly mad because like, I’m this audience! You’re just totally discrediting me and the people like me who enjoy this genre!

MP: Were you a writer early on? Did you feel it early?

BLILER: I did. I actually started reading a lot in middle school, I would read all the time; it was my preferred activity. I have five siblings and they would be outside playing in the summer and I would be inside reading a book. And like I said, we were poor, so when somebody’s birthday or Christmas would come and I wanted to get my siblings something and I didn’t have any money, I would just write them stories and give them stories for Christmas. And I would write my mom stories for her birthday, and eventually she bought me a typewriter that was really cheap because the letter S didn’t work, and so I would type these stories and leave a space for the S and then go back with a pen and fill it, these pages and pages where these S’s were supposed to be.

MP: It sounds like you and Cindy were twins in more ways than one.

BLILER: We actually were. Still are. We were born and raised here in Great Falls. She and I both took pre-law and finished our last semester of college in Washington, D.C. at the American University as part of a Washington internship for Native American students. So, the first time we ever lived away from home was in Washington, D.C., which is funny because our whole lives, we were like, ‘We’re going to be city girls. We’re going to move, we’re going to go to the big city,’ and then when we did our semester there, we couldn’t wait to go home. I said, ‘As soon as I get home, I’m gonna get a career, I’m buyin’ a pickup truck, I’m getting a dog and I’m never leaving again,’ and that’s exactly what I did!

So, born and raised here, we lived in the projects; they were called Parkville at the time, but I lived there the first 20 years of my life. It was right off of 10th Avenue South, on 15th Street and 6th Avenue South. There was a famous restaurant called Jakers Bar & Grill nearby. Kind of centrally located right in the middle of the city... that’s the funny thing; you can get anywhere in this town [GreatFalls] in under four minutes, which is what I love about it.

MP: Were you a good student?

BLILER: No, I wasn’t. We were considered the bad kids in school; we got into a lot of fistfights because our mother is full-blood Native American and our father is white;

he is Scandinavian. So none of the Native students liked us because we were all half-breeds and the white kids didn’t like us because we were Native, so we just fought all the time. It was insane. Looking back on it, it was super-stressful.

MP: What did your father do during your traumatic childhood?

BLILER: My dad used to work in a scrap-metal yard, where he lost his arm in an accident when we were in elementary school. So, after elementary school, he never worked. But he left my mom for another woman anyway, so we never saw him. He didn’t want anything to do with us; we didn’t know him. He was just absent, so it was just mom and her six kids.

MP: Did you graduate college?

BLILER: We did. I’ve got a bachelor’s degree in pre-law with a minor in criminal justice. I started working for the state as a legal-services investigator, one of only four in the state. I was there for ten years and then I just started writing when I would get off work. When I put my first book out, I was still with the state. I didn’t leave until 2016, when I started writing full-time, so a lot of the books that I wrote I was still with the state, working full-time and writing.

MP: You’ve mentioned the odd note that your artistic voice comes from a male muse.

BLILER: Yeah. Most people would assume that because you’re female, you’d have a female muse. I was talking with my sister about it one day, I was having writer’s block and said, ‘I think my muse left me’ and she said, ‘Tell her to come back,’ and I said, ‘I wonder what my muse’s name is?’ and she said, ‘Well, you should just ask and they’ll tell you.’ So I did one day; I was just going to bed and I asked, and you know that magical period when you’re half awake and half asleep? I was right there and this voice just came and said, ‘It’s Lohan.’ And so I woke up and was like, ‘Oh my god, my muse is a guy!’ Isn’t that so crazy? Well, whatever, now he’s my muse.

MP: Which may in part explain the R-rated language of your books.

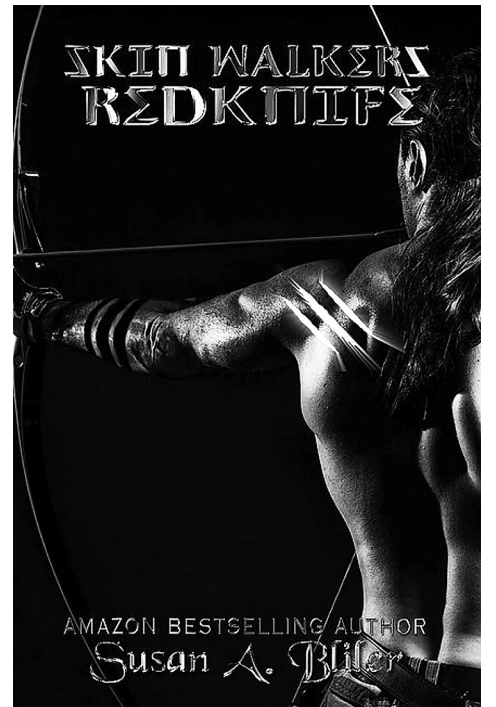
BLILER: Right. It makes sense now that Harlequin said no, because if they hadn’t said no, I would still be stuck in their mold of ‘don’t cuss’ and this is what we want and this is what women want.’ So now I just have the freedom to not play that game and do what I want to do, and it’s really nice. And I’m my own publisher, so I make my own deadline and move my own deadlines.

MP: And before a new reader even reads a word of your work, there’s the visual surprise: it’s double spaced.

BLILER: Yes, and they’re in a larger font! I’m a huge fan of Laura Lee (”Deal Makers,” ”Fallen Heirs”) but first of all, her books are smaller, but then her font is smaller, and then it’s single space, and I’m like, I can’t even read this; it’s painful to read! But I think too when people grab your book where they’re like ‘I don’t have time for this’ and they open it and it’s double spaced, they’re like, ‘Well, this isn’t as long as I thought it would be!’ I think it just makes for easier reading.

MP: Let’s talk about the cultures you write about: manly men and women who have to stand up for themselves.

BLILER: Yes. As you know, romance is



the highest-grossing genre in fiction. So my sister and brothers and I have talked at length about it, and there’s a reason for that, which is that it’s women mostly who are reading this, and they’re all looking for the same thing. So I told my brothers, ‘You know, realistically, if guys had any brains, guys would read romance more than women do, because women read this looking for what they’re not getting in real life. And sure, you’re not going to find a grizzly bear shifter [paranormal beings that can change shape], but you’re going to find men who are protective and doting and some of the old chivalry stuff that has kind of died, but it doesn’t have to be holding doors open and pulling out chairs; it just has to be ‘I’m obsessed with you.’ Loyalty is a huge part of it.

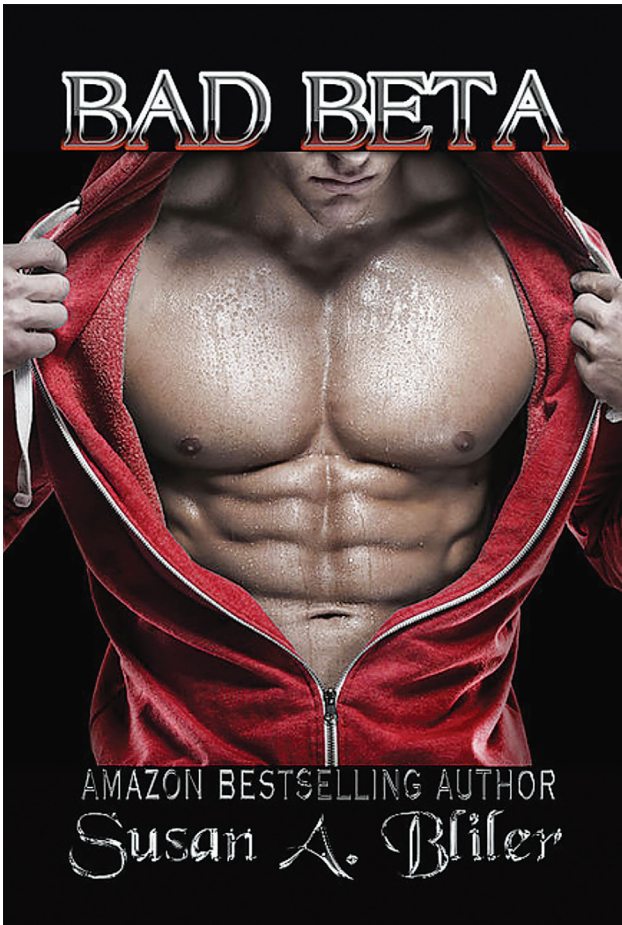
That’s just kind of the way that we grew up. All of my brothers were boxers. My dad was a weightlifter. He lived with us until we were 5 or 6. He had gone to prison for manslaughter and when he came out, he was just super-strong and built. And when you’re a kid, you’re like oh, that’s how guys are supposed to be; my brothers are all fighters, so you just get this idea of what’s masculine in your head.

MP: At that age, did you know that your father was in prison?

BLILER: Yeah, because my mom took us up to visit him. I was too young to understand what prison was and we never found out until we were teenagers what he was in for; we didn’t know what it was, we just borrowed a car and went on a trip. He was in Deer Lodge [Montana].

MP: Did that preordain your rough-haul romantic fiction writing career?

BLILER: It did. In the short time he was with us, he was super-abusive to our mom and I remember all of that. Even after she’d kicked him out, he would come home and just beat her up. There was an incident where all of us kids were home, and he tried to kill her; he stabbed her in front of us. I don’t remember any of it. My siblings remember it and they’re like, ‘You were there, Susie,’ and I’m like, ‘I don’t remember a single second of it,’ I just kind of blocked it out. But I knew at 11 years old that I couldn’t trust my mom and I couldn’t trust my dad. I couldn’t trust my dad because he was a demon and I couldn’t trust my mom because she kept letting the demon back in the house. So regardless of



the fact that we lived with our mom and I had five siblings, I grew up pretty emotionally independent, just because I realized young that you can't rely on people, even the people that you love most or think you're supposed to be able to rely on. You can't, so don't do it.

MP: All of this hit you head-on at a very impressionable age.

BLILER: Yes, super-young and really just trying to develop like what do you know of the world so far. Well, so far I know that we're poor and something's wrong with that. We're brown and something's wrong with that. My mom and dad can't be trusted; men are supposed to be strong but I don't think it's right that they hit women but it keeps happening. There was just a lot of negativity and trying to sort through that, I think that's why I read so much.

MP: First-time readers will recognize that there's a lot of personal back story in your writing.

BLILER: Yeah. I try to do that. All the men are basically the same in all the books; they don't change, but the women change. Some of the women are strong, some of them are weak. Some of them are mean and have been hurt, but I think what I wanted to do was to have other women relate to me because, growing up, I felt so un-relatable. There was always something wrong with us. Now I write these books and you don't put in there the color of the characters usually, unless they're different from what people see in their minds, but when people read, like (last year's) "A Lion's Pride," and it's a white woman reading it and then she gets on my website and sees that I'm Native, in that instance I'm relatable to her because she relates to the character so strongly.

MP: Do tribal women relate in a special way to your books?

BLILER: You know, it's weird; I don't know many tribal women who actually read. There are a few. So my Territory series is

about Wolf Shifterz, and that one is really centered around traditions and lore that I grew up with and really deeply rooted in Montana history. A lot of tribes believe that Yellowstone is where all life is created, and then I will write in those books and put small things in there that other readers don't get but that Native women understand.

I've been working on this stand-alone book for about four years now that's called "Savage Beauty," and it's about the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's movement (MMIW). And since I started it, the movement has kind of blown up, but I stalled out writing it because I want this character to be so relatable to everybody, so I'm taking my time to get it done right. I want people to understand what it's like; we're just so disposable to the rest of the country and the state and easily looked over.

MP: More than most, your books elicit feelings from the reader both ways.

BLILER: Oh, I like that! And the readers are funny too, because of what you evoke from them. I had a reader once who left me a review on a book and it was a one-star review because she was so mad at one of the characters in the book and what he had done, and I'm like, 'Listen and step back, lady, Okay? You're reviewing the book and if I made you that upset with this character, I feel like you should give me five stars because he's not even a real person!'

MP: Do you have a daily schedule of writing hours per day?

BLILER: I don't do hours; what I do is words. I do 2,000 words a day and I don't leave my office until I get my 2,000 words in. If I have to take a break and go cook dinner and then come back up... every once in awhile I'll tell myself, 'Alright, you've got 1,500, don't



push it, just come back tomorrow and write 2,500.' But 2,000 words a day, I keep a little spreadsheet and at the end of the day, I write down my 2,000 words and make sure I've got it in the box. It's hard. There have been times when I've actually forced the writing and my readers know; they will say, 'Hey, this chapter felt really forced' and I'm like oh my God, it was! How did they know? Or 'This book felt rushed!' I'm like oh, they're good; they know what's going on!

BLILER: Do you plot ahead or do you let the book take you?

BLILER: I let the book take me. So right now on my computer I've got 60 books that I've already started that are just sitting there waiting for me to get to them, and I have

probably five more in my phone that I've started. So then what I do, like when I'm done with this book, I won't start anything new; I'll try to go work on something that's been sitting in the background, and then while I'm working on the next book, something new will pop up, but I'll hurry up and write that down, type it out, and then I've got another project started. And this is how I just keep going. The ideas just keep coming.

MP: Does your husband Shane play any part in what you write?

BLILER: No, not at all. It's so funny. So he and I actually went to middle school and high school together and we never talked once; he was a jock and I was a bad kid and we just never, ever talked, not at all, through all those years. We graduated the same year. And then years later, his brother started dating my sister. I know, it gets even crazier.

MP: This is sounding like a book now.

BLILER: So they introduced us and we started dating, and then Shane and I got married and then my sister married his brother. They're divorced now, but for a minute we were married to brothers. We've been together now

for 18 years, 15 years married. Shane is a superintendent for S&H Aluminum, they do metal work, metal siding, and he's been there since he graduated high school, so he's been with them for a long time. But he doesn't read my books. He's just very masculine, does his labor and comes home and wants to sit down and crack a beer and watch TV, which is fine. But he fully supports me. When I told him that I wanted to leave my job and write full-time, I know he was nervous but he supported me in it and he's been really great through the whole thing.

MP: And you've adopted a young one?

BLILER: Yes, three years ago. She just graduated high school. Yeah, we were unable to have any children of our own; we tried for 20 years. And I always wanted a little girl. So our daughter actually is my second cousin. She was taken away from her mother at birth because she had drugs in her system, and she went to stay with her own grandmother, my aunt, and then my aunt died of colon cancer when Josephina was four, and then Josephina went to live with my mom. And then my mom got sick three years ago with shingles and diabetes and she was in the hospital, and then so Josephina came to live with us and then we just kept her and she's been with us ever since. She just graduated from Great Falls High; she's 18.

MP: It sounds from your online posts as if Josephina may already prompt a book or two.

BLILER: (laughs) I know! If I ever get the chance, I might actually write about me someday! ★

—JAY MACDONALD

Montana's 25th Annual TWO-SPIRIT GATHERING



Late on a rain-soaked August evening by the north shores of Flathead Lake, a few dozen people packed into a small shoreside chapel. Drag performer and emcee Landa Lakes stepped into the spotlight and placed a small gray papier-mâché dollhouse at center stage. A recording of Lakes' voice edited to sound like a vintage educational tape warbled through the speakers of the public address system.

"When making your dolls," said Lakes, "Remember that boys have short hair and wear pants. Girls have ponytails and dresses. Try to cut them as boxy as possible. They should all be exactly the same."

Lakes then gingerly pulled a chain of paper dolls from the dollhouse and stood for minutes on stage, pulling up string after string until eventually she held 215 miniature paper figures in her arms.

"Don't worry if you mess up. Just take your mistakes, crumple them up, and discard them."

For Landa Lakes, the dolls represent dead bodies unearthed last May at the site of the now-defunct Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia. Until the 1990s, American and Canadian officials separated Indigenous children from their families, sending kids as young as three years old to facilities like Kamloops where they suffered mistreatment and severe punishments in efforts by officials to assimilate them to Western culture.

As she held the red figures in her arms, Lakes turned her gaze towards the audience. The warm and soothing tones of a traditional Chickasaw lullaby replaced the recording.



Lakes invited the audience, all attendees of the 25th Annual Montana Two-Spirit Gathering, to come on stage and make a circle. After attendees assembled on stage, Lakes passed the bundle of paper dolls from one person to the next until everyone onstage had carried the burden at least once.

Some people found their eyes had welled up with tears. The cause of death and identities of almost half of the children found at Kamloops remains unknown.

DECADES IN THE MAKING

Landa Lakes was just one of many artists and activists bringing together traditional Indigenous art and contemporary Queer culture this past August in Rollins, Montana. The 25th Annual Gathering was organized by the Missoula-based Montana Two-Spirit Society, and was the first event held by the group since the cancellation of last year's festivities. The four-night event saw the return of workshops, pageantry, vendors, traditional singing and dancing, and spirited conversation.

Over 70 members of various tribal nations from across Montana and North America flocked to the Flathead Lake Methodist Camp on the week of August 16th. Many were artists and activists seeking creative ways to help heal collective trauma Queer Indigenous people have accumulated over the last 20 months and celebrate the return of communal gatherings in as an as-safe-as-possible environment.

COVID-19 has struck Indigenous communities disproportionately hard. Indigenous people are 3.5 times more likely to contract COVID, according to the CDC and many of the activities and discussions at the recent gathering centered on expressing grief and anguish, reaching out to one another emotionally, and building a future on Indigenous knowledge.

Current MTSS director David Herrera and board chair Steven Barrios, referred to by many long-time attendees as Auntie Steven, founded the MTSS in 1996, with the first gathering coming the following year. Herrera, an adopted member of the Blackfeet tribe, was

also a founding board member of Pride Montana, where Barrios worked.

Herrera began work on the MTSS in 1995 with the encouragement of Diane Sands, fellow founding member and future State legislator. Herrera said Sands saw a need for Pride Montana to reach out to the Indigenous community and he agreed to help.

Montana's gathering was among the first of its kind. The activist work of the pair, along with the Montana Gay Men's Task Force, shaped the society during the AIDS epidemic that devastated Queer communities throughout the 1980s and 90s.

"My work back then was mostly based in HIV prevention," said Herrera, "But through conferences I wound up meeting someone associated with the Denver Two-Spirit Society. I'd heard that they had done these types of gathering and I thought, 'It'd be so great to do one of these in Montana.'"

Herrera pitched the leaders of the statewide organization on the idea and with their funding and additional grants he managed to get the gathering off the ground. From there, the society steadily built a staff and a reputation and was fully incorporated as an independent non-profit organization in 2007, becoming the only LGBTQ+ organization of its kind serving people of color in Montana.

"[Our] vision for our society was to bring our Indigenous brothers and sisters together from all over, even as far as Australia," said MTSS board chair Barrios. "We've had people call us and say, 'As long as you are doing this, providing this cultural event, I will fly in. I will find a way to pay the fare, no matter what.'"



Over the last two-and-a-half decades, the event has grown, becoming the longest-running Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer gathering in North America. Before the pandemic, the event drew more people with each passing year, attracting over 200 attendees in 2019.

Under normal circumstances, the quarter-centennial celebration would have been a grand affair. But the pandemic forced the organization to scale back expectations and focus more on health and safety precautions. With the Delta Variant spreading at an alarming pace in early August, Herrera and Barrios asked Steve Williamson, Billings Regional Director of the Indian Health Service, what precautions they should take. As a result, staff members asked for proof of full vaccination at the door, required masks to be worn inside at all times, and checked the temperature of each attendee before breakfast. Although safety guidelines meant the exclusion of immunocompromised and unvaccinated guests, Herrera says that everyone turned away, though disappointed, understood the necessity of the rules.

DEFINITION OF TWO-SPRIT

So what exactly does it mean to be Two-Spirit? According to the South Dakota legislature, the only State entity to officially recognize Two-Spirit identity, the term is defined as “a culturally and spiritually distinct gender traditionally recognized among Native American nations.” It is often explained as a “third gender,” or as an Indigenous precursor to the modern LGBTQ+ community.

Two-Spirits are rooted in traditions of their ancestors and also represent a living movement of Queer Indigenous people from all over Indian Country. A shared sense of identity often unites Two-Spirit individuals; many are concerned with the future of Native American communities and tasked with imagining different paths forward in a world where the destructive impact of European exploration and settlement in North America on Indigenous populations can be discussed openly.

Two-Spirit and Indigenous traditions, now understood as Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer cultural practices, predate Western gender roles and family structures and the modern conceptions of LGBTQ+ identity that formed in response.

There is little new about people who defy gender roles as defined by contemporary standards. In fact, a time existed when many people on the North American continent knew and accepted people who crossed such boundaries, seeing them as valued members of society.

Europeans were surprised, however, by such accepted practices. In 1513, Spanish col-



onist Vasco Nunez de Balboa came across an Indigenous leader in Panama whose sibling, along with forty other people assigned male at birth, wore women’s clothing and lived with other Two-Spirits in domestic relationships. De Balboa accused them of being “sodomites” and had them thrown out of the leader’s palace, pursued by dogs.

During the period of westward expansion from the 17th into the early 20th century, many European traders, settlers and ethnographers wrote with wonder about meeting Indigenous people who straddled the line between what they thought of as male and female. In 1825, historian Charles Trowbridge described a meeting between fur traders and a band of Cherokees who, though presumably assigned male at birth, “adopted the dress and performed all the duties of women, and who lived their whole lives in this manner.”

Two-spirit traditions existed in at least 155 Tribal Nations in North America, with a wide variety of diversity. The only constant was people taking on both masculine and feminine responsibilities, moving from one end of the spectrum to the other to better meet their tribe’s needs.

Most records of tribal histories and cultures existed in the oral tradition and, in the suppression of Indigenous culture, tribes lost many of these historical pathways. Modern events like the Two-Spirit gathering hope to reconcile what has been lost by restoring old traditions and reintroducing Indigenous interpretations of gender and sexuality to new generations.

Two-Spirit traditions are based on spirituality

ARTISTS & ACTIVISTS

Individuals from across the west came together to celebrate traditional Indigenous art and contemporary Queer culture this past August in Rollins, Montana, where the Missoula-based Montana Two-Spirit Society organized the 25th Annual Two-Spirit Gathering. The four-night event saw the return of workshops, pageantry, vendors, traditional singing and dancing, and spirited conversation.



PAGEANT NIGHT

A highlight of the recent gathering was the Two-Spirit Pageant and Talent Show. After sundown on the second night, entrants competed for the crowns of Miss and Mr. Montana Two-Spirit. The society entrusts winners with representing Montana at cultural events and powwows throughout the following year.

Judges tasked contestants with performing one traditional performance and a contemporary piece. The audience saw a contestant in handmade regalia singing a lullaby in their Native language, then a choreographed floor routine and lip sync to a Taylor Swift song for the next performance.

This year the competition came down to two entrants: Silas Hoffer, a 28-year-old Yakima student and youth advocate from Oregon’s Grand Ronde Community, and Elton Naswood (AKA ‘Miss Eartha Quake’), a 47-year-old drag performer and member of the Diné (Navajo) Nation.

“I’m thinking of this pageant as a pageant,” said Naswood. “But I need to think of it as more of a community role, an ambassador. I’m hoping that I have visibility for this community on a tribal government level, and on a national level.”

“Being two-spirit, to me, is very empowering,” Naswood added. “It allows me to express my masculine and feminine aspects with a cultural perspective on them. The term is one that I’ve embraced more recently. But being away from the reservation it allowed me to find a community of people who have that

PAGENTRY

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same perspective. That term allowed people to understand who I was, as a Native and as a gay man.”

Silas Hoffer, a transmasculine non-binary person, said considering the title prompted some deeper thoughts about what exactly it meant to be “Mister Montana Two-Spirit,” seemingly a contradiction in terms.

“It plays into those binaries,” said Hoffer. “It’s like — I’m a transgender guy, I guess. You know, transmasculine. But I would say I’m more feminine. That’s just who I am. I like to play with makeup and all that stuff, and I don’t feel like being a guy should hold me back from that. So part of me was like, ‘I don’t wanna be Mister Two-Spirit, I kinda want to be Miss Two-Spirit.’ But then I don’t want people to disrespect my gender. I think if you took away the gendered part, it would open up more opportunities and make people more comfortable.”

Spirit Wildcat, former Miss Montana Two-Spirit and member of the Shoshone-Bannack band of Southern Idaho, said she feels the gendered titles can serve as more than arbitrary labels. Wildcat prefers to think of them as an invitation to explore questions of identity with more depth and consideration.

“I know we have two-spirit people who go this way, and then to the other side... they hover around. But to me, it’s only for a year. You can be our Mister, with that masculinity for one year. And then after that, you can have free range. But just stick with something for a little and see how it goes. You’ll start to learn how you feel inside,” added Wildcat.

COMMUNITY AND ISOLATION

Gatherings are good for bringing together a community often physically and emotionally isolated. In rural reservations and urban areas, queer communities are often small or non-existent, and pressure to fit in can be immense.

According to Sarah Hunt, Indigenous health researcher at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, even within their own tribal communities, two-spirit and LGBTQ+ Natives face discrimination and exclusion.

Hunt emphasized, “The loss of [Native] languages has resulted in much of the knowledge of Two-Spirit roles being lost or marginalized in some communities. Rather than being respected, many Two-Spirit people face targeted violence... and struggle to have their lives recognized.”

Lane Walker, 31, is a member of the A’aninin (Gros Ventre) Tribe. Growing up on the Fort Belknap Reservation in northern Montana, community, was hard to find. Walker grew up moving back and forth between his family home outside of Chinook and Denver, Colorado, where his mother worked. Walker grew up not knowing anything about Two-Spirit traditions in his culture and only discovered the term last year.



“I’ve never really been around queer Natives,” Walker said. “Living in Denver for as long as I was, most of my friends were white. And there were a lot of things I couldn’t talk to them about. Especially the anger. I’ve been really frustrated for the last ten years and I just keep it in. Or rant to my family.”

Walker said the frustration comes from multiple sources. Coming out as transgender strained some of the close relationships in his life and the national political climate grew increasingly hostile to trans and gender non-conforming people. Montana’s legislature alone passed several laws over the last two years meant to curtail the civil rights of LGBTQ+ and Indigiqueer communities.

Amidst all this an unprecedented wave of suicides struck Walker’s reservation, prompting the Fort Belknap community council to declare an official state of emergency in the summer of 2019.

“On my reservation,” said Walker, “There’s probably been just this year about five youth suicides. We can never be sure why they chose to take their lives, but I know that there’s still a lot of homophobia. Even if people aren’t getting beat up, they’re still saying things. So, I decided for the first time on our reservation we would fly the Two-Spirit flag outside our building. And then, for the traditional Pow-Wow and parade... I had my sister make a sign for me, and we decorated our mom’s car with balloons, flags and these two posters. One said ‘Decolonize,’ and the other said ‘Restore Tradition.’”

Walker spoke of the difficulty of trying to create spaces for Two-Spirits on his home reservation without the support of a broader organization.



“My Aunt [Brandi King], as far as I know, was the first Two-Spirit person to be on the [Tribal] Council. But I think it got to be too much for her... she was trying to get something going, but she had to resign. [MSU Northern] up in Havre, they were trying to get a group going. But after a while, I was one of the only people showing up, and it kinda fell apart.”

On the third night of the Two-Spirit Gathering, everyone dressed in their finest regalia for Pow-Wow night. For some that meant gleaming silver-and-red jingle dresses, handmade

eagle staffs, and family heirlooms. For others it was perhaps a ribbon skirt over a dusty pair of sneakers, or maybe coverall shorts and a spiked denim cap with faux leather horns. Each piece of regalia showed off the individuality of each contestant.

Towards the end of the evening, David Herrera, emcee Buffalo Barbie, and Spirit Wildcat (who helped hand-bead and embroider the ceremonial crown and sash with a relative) officially crowned Elton Naswood as Miss Two-Spirit Montana and Silas Hoffer as Mister Two-Spirit



Montana. Accompanied by Missoula's All-Nations Center drum circle, they ushered in their year-long reign with an honor dance.

Although the overall mood of the gathering, especially during the pageant and pow-wow, was celebratory, some attendees noted a tension between the old guard coming out of the ranks of AIDS activism and more mainstream Gay activism, and the new class of individuals that continue to challenge what it means to live outside of the gender binary established after European settlement.

There have been efforts by the Two-Spirit staff and board to keep the Gathering as inclusive as possible. Organizers strove to maintain gender equity among the pipe-bearers for the sunrise smoke ceremony that started off each day. They had female-identified elders leading talking circles and devoted a panel to a group of transgender leaders like Shane Ortega, one of the first trans men to serve openly in the Army, speaking about the intersection between trans issues and Two-Spirit concerns.

Others, however, question having gender-segregated bathrooms and other barriers at what is supposed to be a safe refuge.

Tavi Hawn is a non-enrolled member of the Eastern Band Cherokee and works as a therapist and consultant in Baltimore, Maryland. Hawn was a first-time attendee, only becoming familiar with the gathering in 2016.

Hawn is non-binary, one of several participants who identify as neither male nor female.



But upon arriving, Hawn felt that basic resources for people like them were lacking in key respects.

"There's some people who just aren't in the practice of asking for pronouns, and assumptions get made," said Hawn. "I get 'she/her' a lot. People assume that I'm female by default. And that can be frustrating, especially in a Queer space where you feel like the point is to be breaking past the binary."

Hawn explained that they wanted to participate in future gatherings but they said they still feel a need on the part of leadership to accommodate groups of people who have until recently been less visible in Queer and Indigenous movements.

"I think right off the bat, bathrooms should be all-gender," Hawn said, adding, "I know there's been efforts made with the pipe bearers to be more inclusive, but I'd like to see that continued and extended."



MISS AND MR. TWO-SPIRIT MONTANA 2021

Miss Montana Two-Spirit 2021 Elton Naswood (AKA 'Miss Eartha Quake'), a 47-year-old drag performer and member of the Diné (Navajo) Nation (at left) and Mr. Montana Two-Spirit 2021, Silas Hoffer, a 28-year-old Yakima student and youth advocate from Oregon's Grand Ronde Community (at right).

COMMUNITY

On the final morning of the event, the tipi came down, cabins were cleared, and everyone went their separate ways. Some new friendships were made and songs and dances were shared. The common hope shared by many participants was for new generations to be raised without the boundaries and limitations imposed on Indigenous people, breaking cycles of trauma and repression while creating lasting communal bonds.



BRINGING IT HOME

11-year-old Kai Rowse was the first youth to attend the Montana gathering. Rowse's family has been coming to Flathead Lake every year since 2015 when Kai was only five. Kai, who is Choctaw, Cherokee and Cree, has had the experience of being raised with an awareness of Two-Spirit individuals.

Speaking up during a conversation circle between young attendees and a selection of the elders present, Kai explained their frustration with mainstream perspectives of gender binaries, "I wish people could just forget. Forget everything they know about what a boy is supposed to do, or what a girl is supposed to do, and to stop thinking that there are just two genders."

Two-Spirit youth like Kai openly express the ultimate hope shared by many of the participants who came together at the gathering, the hope that new generations can be raised without the boundaries and limitations imposed on Indigenous people, breaking cycles of trauma and repression while creating lasting communal bonds.

As this year's gathering ended, one last event remained to celebrate the sense of community built during the shared time together. Everyone in camp came together in a circle around a green woolen blanket and a star quilt. They set a spread of homemade crafts, shirts, blankets, books, and at least one pair of patent leather thigh-high, spike-heel boots on the blankets.

The last day is always a "giveaway" day and everyone lined up to honor elders and express gratitude with gifts and heartfelt words. Board members handed out Pendleton-patterned blankets to those who spoke at panels, did meal prep in the kitchen, or otherwise worked

to keep things running smoothly. Others presented hand-crafted goods, such as taxidermy artist Aoedhen Crawford who presented skilled beader and former lawyer Clyde Hall with a ceremonial eagle staff made from bear hide and feathers.

Director David Herrera took the chance at the circle to speak to the entire group one last time.

"Thank you for trusting us to put on a gathering during the pandemic. We've gone through a lot over the past 28 months, with some staggering losses," said Herrera. "But you trusted us to provide a safe space where people can heal. Thank you for making this the incredible gathering that it has been."

The next morning the tipi was taken down, cabins were cleared out, and everyone went their separate ways. Some new friendships were made and songs and dances were shared. Despite the hurdles, the tradition has been carried on for at least another year.

Young Kai Rowse summed up their primary feeling at the end of the week, one shared by many others. "It makes me happy to be here," said Rowse. "I feel welcome here. I like the acceptance that everybody has. I can just be me, and that makes me feel really good." ★

—GWEN NICHOLSON

The 26th Annual Two-Spirit Gathering will be held in August of 2022. Registration is open to members of Tribal nations, or those sponsored by an enrolled member. For more details, visit mttwospiritsociety.org.

PHOTOS BY MEL PONDER

SEE MORE AT
WWW.MELPONDER.COM

WE RECOMMEND...

STATEWIDE ENTERTAINMENT LISTINGS

Music, Performances and Events Across Montana

The monthly calendar is a sampling of events and activities across the state. All events listed are subject to change. Send event updates to: info@montanapress.net for consideration. Contact (406) 370-1492 for details.



IMAGINE IRELAND - MISSOULA

Traditional Irish music circle
Thursdays at 5 p.m. at
Imagine Nation Brewing in
Missoula. For info:
ImagineNationBrewing.com.



SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARKS

Across Montana, Wyoming, Idaho and other points west, a professional traveling theatre troupe still performs Shakespeare's classics. Performances of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Cymbeline" are staged in venues from town centers to parks, county courthouse lawns and university campuses. All performances are free. Performances of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" are scheduled at the Shane Lalani Center for the Arts in Livingston on Sat., Sept. 4, in Altenbrand Park in Manhattan on Sun., Sept. 5, and at the UM Oval in Missoula on Tues., Sept. 7. Performances of "Cymbeline" are scheduled for Lewis and Clark Park in Belgrade on Mon., Sept. 6 and at the UM Oval in Missoula on Wed., Sept. 8. Full tour listings and information about the theatre troupe can be found at ShakespeareInTheParks.org.



LANEY LOU AND THE BIRD DOGS

Montana's homegrown stomp-grass folk band, Laney Lou and the Bird Dogs play traditional folk, blues, and country tunes. Touring the state in early fall: Fri., Sept. 10 at Love Field in Bozeman with the Ryan Acker Trio and Sat., Sept. 11 at River's Edge Trail in Great Falls before heading out of Montana for a Western tour, including stops in Moscow, ID, Salt Lake City, UT, Portland, OR and more. For info: LaneyLouandtheBirdDogs.com.



THE PARTICULARLY RENICULOUS VARIETY SHOW

Nicholas Rogers, Eric Anton, and a slew of other local Billings comics come take on all bystanders and onlookers for heavy laughs and deep groans. On Fri., Sept. 17 at Kirk's Grocery in Billings. For info: KirksGrocery.com.



LIVE BROADCAST PLAY - BUTTE-

Live on KBMF 102.5 in Butte or online at ButteAmericaRadio.org on Mon., Sept. 6, Wed., Sept. 8 and Fri., Sept. 10: a broadcast of the radio play, "Duffy McGee" written by David Fletcher. The play is a tale of family, baseball, being young and growing old, set in Butte in the dog days of summer.



PINKY AND THE FLOYD - MONTANA TOUR -

Performing over 80 songs and seven full albums worth of Pink Floyd music, Montana's Pinky and the Floyd is one of the premier Pink Floyd tribute acts in the industry. Members of the band are professional working musicians spanning genres from Americana and vintage swing to hip hop, jazz, country, salsa, funk, rock, and blues. Touring Montana in September: Sept. 9 in Big Sky, Sept. 24 in Missoula and Sept. 25 in Bozeman. Info: PinkyAndTheFloyd.com.



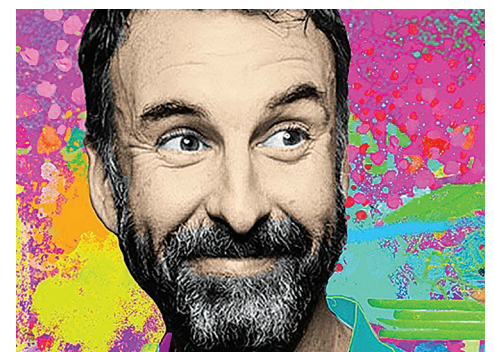
ANNUAL FESTIVAL - LEWISTOWN -

Celebrating its 32nd anniversary this year, the Chokecherry Festival is scheduled for Sat., Sept. 11 in downtown Lewistown. Featuring children's activities and live entertainment, craft and food vendors and all things chokecherry, from syrup to jam to soap. Info: (406) 535-5436, or email: lewchamb@midrivers.com.



BOZEMAN FILM FESTIVAL

The fourth annual BZN International Film Festival spotlights women filmmakers, directors, actors and producers who are pioneering projects to "change current statistics and elevate women's visions and voices." This year from Sept. 9 through 12, BZN will screen films both in person at venues in Downtown Bozeman as well as 60+ offerings on the new BZN App. Info: BozemanFilmCelebration.com.



MATT BRAUNGER LIVE - BILLINGS -

Comedian Braunger (Mad TV, Comedy Central, Marvel's Agent Carter) brings his "Out of the House Tour" to the Pub Station in Billings on Sat., Sept. 11. Info: ThePubStation.com.

ROOTS-RICH VIBES ON THE LOCAL STAGE: MADELINE HAWTHORNE



Music is a risk Madeline Hawthorne needed to take and she's taken it in stride.

A stirring singer-songwriter, Madeline dispenses roots-rich vibes on local stages, both as a solo artist and in concert with talented players. Increasingly confident, and spreading her wings artistically, Hawthorne is on the verge of releasing her first original album, a smooth-to-the-ear production she calls *Boots*.

Madeline's story starts in Boston, the city of her birth, where her mother, a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music, earned a master's degree in vocal performance, excelling as a solo soprano, Baroque-style.

"She performed (Johann Sebastian) Bach and (George Frideric) Handel," says Madeline. "Very different style from mine in the sense of me writing my own material and making it available for people to listen to."

In 1997, when she was nine, Madeline moved with her family to a small college town in New Hampshire. She was in choir throughout most of her childhood and came into possession of her first guitar at 16, when she began to write songs shaped by folk and classic rock artists such as Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young.

"When I was 15, I found recordings from my mom and her four sisters," Madeline says, noting the connection she felt to both the music and her mother and aunts. "It was the first time that I'd heard 'Where Do the Children Play' by Cat Stevens. There were James Taylor tunes and they were singing 'Leaving on a Jet Plane' (by John Denver). That was at the stage where I was really getting interested in folk and classic rock. The name Hawthorne is actually a tie to my mom's side of the family, and for me a tie to the music that has been an important part in my life and what I am choosing for a career. I chose to use Hawthorne as a part of my identity for the rest of my life."

A LIFE VEERS TO MUSIC

Madeline first came to Montana to attend college at Montana State University, in Bozeman, where she studied sustainable food systems. The suggestion of music as a career seemed impossibly unreal then, she says.

"But more and more, I was drawn to music and had this almost desperate feeling of needing to perform, to write, to be creative, and I struggled to manage a career as a full-time student, working part-time, and also digging into the craft of songwriting and the skill of developing performing skills."

At age 25, Madeline says that she started to invest in music seriously. At 29, she elected to dive without netting into the artist's life, scrapping her job to play music full-time. The significance of belonging was the final arbiter: there was no higher authority.

"When I was in graduate school and inside the world of sustainable food systems, I didn't have the feeling that I quite belonged there. Since then, I have been learning every day, every show, and every tour. When you are in it fully there is no option but to make it work. It is a constant game of problem solving," she admits, "I need to stay positive and stay humble and work hard. It can be difficult to maintain that kind of a mindset. But if I can maintain a positive attitude and be creative, I believe that I will figure out how to navigate the world of music and performing."

BOZEMAN BASED AND BUOYED

Committed to the change, Madeline toured locally and regionally for about five years with a band called the Hawthorne Roots before shifting to performing primarily as a solo artist.

"Things are more personal at more intimate shows, just me, my guitar," Hawthorne admits. "After a show the words of encouragement, a comment that the lyrics meant something to someone, that helps boost those feelings of confidence. As someone who performs a lot by herself, I feel confident not having to come up with a different persona of who I am when I am on stage. There are bits of validation to be able to connect with others through music. And it's been validating to know that no matter what happens that I have myself, and my guitar, and that I could rely on myself."

Consistently polled by residents of Bozeman as one of the city's favorite musicians, Madeline says she sees the relationship with her hometown as something proportioned, even symbiotic.



"Bozeman is an amazing community to foster a singer-songwriter," she says. "Right now, I'm alternating (as a soloist) with a local cover band that is supportive and awesome. The five of us are all participating in choosing material... In Montana, we only have each other right now. To be an independent grassroots artist, it actually takes a village and good people behind you. I got started playing at the Haufbrau House, an iconic dive bar that has been the birthplace of many, many groups and the hangout for so many supportive local Bozeman musicians."

THE RAW ROCK N' ROLL OF ROOTS

Madeline's debut recording was crafted and polished by co-producers Brad Parsons and Tyler Thompson and recorded at Studio 110 in Pittsburgh. Parsons is a member of the Portland-based "newgrass" band Fruition, and its R&B-centric mandolinist, Mimi Naja, is featured on the record. Madeline had something valuable to offer, and Parsons clearly articulated it.

"Working with Brad helped me believe in myself and to keep going, giving me the confidence and energy to move forward," she explains. "I wrote the songs in Montana and sent them to Brad, just the raw guitar and vocals."

Roots offers similarities to Sheryl Crow's earliest recording style. Deliciously underdone, pink and unprocessed, perhaps reminiscent of Tom Petty's solo studio album from 1994 *Wildflowers*, rock n' roll that demonstrates a firm command of its instruments and vocals, knowledgeable and poised in its beauty.

"It has a nice, raw, natural, rock n' roll kind of vibe," says Madeline. "Having started to write the songs in May, 2019, to be at this point for it to go out into the world, it feels good to have made it that far."

Indeed, the recording confirms that music is a place where Madeline belongs, offering a secure position of expression and purpose.

"Working through every single process of music on this record, I had this sense of belonging, and the drive to do it, to be in a place where I feel like I belong. We all need a sense of belonging, of being in this world. My dad always encouraged us kids to work and pursue a career that gives you meaning in your world."

PERSEVERANCE

Madeline says that she is studying the path of notable women in the music business whose art she admires, productive talents who are now in their 40s and 50s, and even well beyond, like Susan Tedeschi (50) and Bonnie Raitt (71). Inspired by such examples, Madeline intends to elaborate the craft of music.

"They have shown that music is not just a useful pursuit for the young and that a woman could continue to connect with others through music for a long time. Staying in Montana and building my career, that's the goal," Madeline admits.

"I do love to be on the road, love exploring. It would be great to take time off in the fall and get back to the drawing board and write new material. I've got a notebook full of different ideas to work through. I will continue to stick with it, because I like being in a place where I feel as if I do belong." ★

—BRIAN D'AMBROSIO

For more information, visit MadelineHawthorne.com.



OUT & ABOUT

MONTANA TABLE: ROYAL PURPLE



Life is quiet in the small Montana town of Trout Creek. Situated on the banks of the Clark Fork River, the town boasts just under 200 residents. This past August, however, Trout Creek hosted an annual event that grows the community's population by several fold.

Held annually on the second full weekend in August, the Trout Creek Huckleberry Festival, a community gathering that has been a local mainstay for over 40 years.

Elizabeth Haagenson, festival chair, estimates the event draws anywhere between 3,000 and 6,000 visitors who travel to Trout Creek to take in its cornucopia of huckleberry-infused goods, from huckleberry cheesecake and huckleberry sundaes to huckleberry lemonade.

When asked what brings so many people to Trout Creek each year, Haagenson replied simply, "the huckleberry."

A WILD FIND

Given the huckleberry's elevated status, it would seem like a no-brainer to grow the berry commercially. But thus far, in its history the huckleberry has resisted domestication.

The stubborn nature of the plant was no obstacle for one research group from Washington State University who are trying to tame the tiny purple berry.

Amit Dhingra—along with his colleagues from the genomics and biotechnology research lab in the Horticulture Department at WSU—have successfully grown fruit-bearing huckleberry plants in greenhouse conditions.

Some of the plants are the descendents of seedlings the lab purchased from a local nursery. Others are hybrids that the research group created by crossing domesticated blueberry plants with their wild huckleberry cousins. The hope is that one day these hybrids can lead to plants that can be grown on farms or in the home gardens of huckleberry enthusiasts.

Huckleberries grow under forest canopies throughout the Northwest, in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington.

For some residents of the Treasure State the huckleberry is a way of life. Each year tourists, locals and commercial pickers flock to places like the Flathead, Bitterroot and Kootenai National Forests to pick wild huckleberries, often keeping secret the locations of their favorite picking spots.

Who could blame huckleberry enthusiasts

for their obsession? The berry's flavor is a harmonic pairing of tartness and sweetness.

"I have only one word for it; I call it 'legendary,'" said Dhingra, describing the berry's unique flavor.

Dhingra says the flavor is partly due to the pigments the berry contains. Unlike a blueberry, which has translucent flesh, the huckleberry's flesh has a deep violet color, the result of the presence of a family of chemicals related to antioxidants called anthocyanins.

So why has the huckleberry evaded domestication for so long?

Dhingra says there are lots of theories, but he speculates that it has to do with the specific environment in which the huckleberry grows—the "ecological niche" where the berry is adapted to thrive.

In other words, the huckleberry is persnickety and doesn't like to stray too far from home. Take it out of its natural environment, and it tends to wither and die.

BUILDING A BETTER BERRY?

For Dhingra, creating a plant that can grow in a home garden or on a farm is about more than just bringing a new crop to market. For him, it's also about cultivating a nutritious, healthful crop that could have a positive impact on human health.

Dhingra says his interest in such plants goes back to his roots. He grew up in India, where his parents practiced both modern and Ayurvedic medicine.

"I look at plants a little bit differently. They're not just plants for me. They're providers of food, medicine, and nutrition."

The huckleberry isn't the only wild berry whose potential benefits have yet to be untapped. Dhingra says exploring the wild foods of other ecological niches is a worthwhile endeavor, not only for uncovering possible health benefits but also in light of climate change and the potential need to cultivate climate-resistant crops.

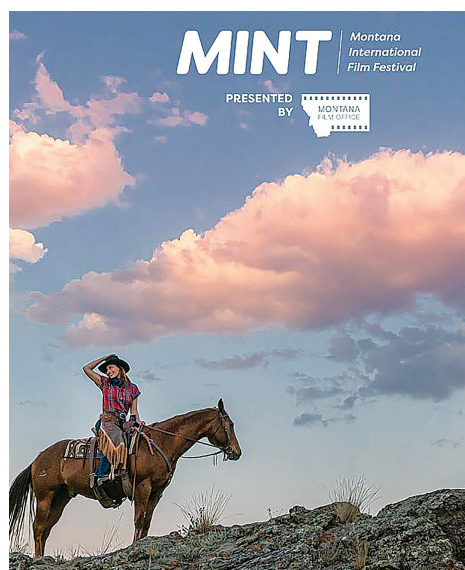
Huckleberries are part of the ecological fabric of this area of the American West. Whether on the trail, at a farmer's market stand or perhaps even one day in the Montana garden, the berry is the delicious and nutritious royal fruit of summer. ★

—ANNIE PENTILLA

WE RECOMMEND...

STATEWIDE ENTERTAINMENT LISTINGS

Music, Performances and Events Across Montana



MONTANA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL - BILLINGS & ONLINE

The 4th annual MINT Film Festival takes place in Downtown Billings in person Sept 16-19 and Virtually from Sept 16-Oct 3. Attendees can stream more than 80 films from around the world including Made-In-Montana stories, narrative features, documentaries, and short films. Info: MintFilmFestival.org



ALLMAN BETTS BAND

In 2017, Devon Allman organized a concert at the Fillmore in San Francisco to honor the music and memory of his father, founding Allman Brothers Band keyboardist and singer, Gregg Allman, and also to debut his new band, The Devon Allman Project. The marathon performance marked the beginning of a partnership with Duane Betts, son of founding Allman Brothers Band guitarist and singer, Dickey Betts. The band now also includes Berry Duane Oakley, son of the Allman Brothers Band's founding late bassist, Berry Oakley. Playing live at the Pub Station Ballroom in Billings on Wed., Sept 15 and the ELM in Bozeman on Sept. 16. For info: AllmanBettsBand.com.



WINNIE BRAVE

This husband and wife team have carved out a family business from their shared love of the game. Drawing inspiration from their extensive travels throughout Canada and the USA, their songs reflect on small town life and the folks who happen to cross their paths. Armed with two guitars and an old suitcase drum, many say this Americana duo is greater than the sum of their parts. Playing in Helena on Tues., Sept 14 at Broadwater Hot Springs; Sat., Sept. 18 in Great Falls at the Celtic Cowboy; and back at Broadwater in Helena on Tues., Oct. 12. Info: WinnieBrave.com





**THE SPRINGS AT
PHILIPSBURG BREWERY**

Live music on an outside stage throughout the spring and summer in Philipsburg including:

Fri., Sept. 10 - Larry Hirshberg - Folk
Sat., Sept. 11 - Lucas Yacht - Americana
Fri., Sept. 17 - Johnny Dango - rock
Sat., Sept. 18 - Boondock Boys - rock
Fri., Sept. 24 - Tanner Laws - country
Fri., Oct. 1 - Anthony Sutton - folk

Also featuring live music every Sunday afternoon.
PhilipsburgBrewingCompany.com.



**JEFFREY FOUCALT
- TOTAL REQUEST LIVE -**

American songwriter and record producer Foucault is dusting off the livestream format for a live, all-request show on Wed., Sept. 29. Foucault's work marries the influence of American country, blues, rock 'n' roll, and folk. Info: **JeffreyFoucault.com.**



**SPIRIT HOTEL & PANTHER CAR
- MISSOULA -**

Bringing color-struck gothic dream-pop to the seance , Sprit Hotel will open for Panther Car, a "tried and true-blue angular Pythagorean psychedelia." At Zootown Arts on Fri., Sept. 17. Info: **ZootownArts.org.**

THE MONTANA DISTILLERS GUILD INVITES YOU TO OUR SECOND ANNUAL

DISTILLERS FESTIVAL

9.12.21

CARAS PARK - MISSOULA - 2:30 PM

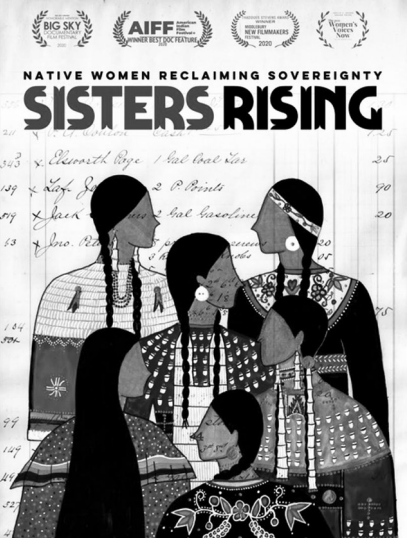
SPECIAL SCREENING

SISTERS RISING

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American Indian Film Festival

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER 29
7:00PM | \$10

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59				60						61				

JONESIN' CROSSWORDS

"Just Irish"

ACROSS

- 1 Concession stand drinks
6 Tugs
11 Shot in the arm
14 Authoritative decree
15 "You're ____ and don't even know it"
16 Need to square up with
17 Compliant "Transformers" director?
19 Milliner's product
20 Printer refill
21 Coast-to-coast vacation, maybe
22 "(You're) Having My Baby" singer Paul
23 Sheepish sounds
24 Orchestra woodwinds
25 Beach atmosphere
28 Sapphire novel on which the film "Precious" was based
29 T, e.g.
30 Allowed past the door
35 "Lara Croft: ____ Raider"
36 Showing little emotion
37 Roman emperor after Claudius
38 Mixed vegetables ingredient, maybe
40 Laundry day target
41 Distant lead-in
42 Car accessory
43 ____ pastry (eclair basis)
45 Five-iron nickname

- 48 Architect Ludwig Mies van der ____
49 Casino customer
50 Bearded zoo animal
53 Intent
54 Pop soloist familiar with the Egyptian underworld?
56 "Don't text and drive," e.g.
57 Optimal
58 Come together
59 RR stop
60 Teacher's summons
61 Printer refill

DOWN

- 1 Big rig
2 Mythological deity with two ravens
3 Nickname for Nixon
4 German grumble
5 Illuminated, as at night
6 "Big Three" conference site of 1945
7 "To reach ____, we must sail ..." (FDR quote)
8 "Dona ____ pacem" (Mass phrase)
9 Hold onto
10 Mess of a spot
11 Unfortunate tractor inventor?
12 Up
13 Software versions still being tested
18 At any point

- 22 Kind of ballot
23 Potato chip flavor
24 In circulation
25 They haven't flown for 18 years
26 Self-help Internet site
27 Disappointing "Save Me" singer-songwriter?
28 File on a phone
30 "What am ____ do?"
31 Mail motto word
32 "F9" actor/producer Diesel
33 Reggae Sunsplash adjective
34 Taboo
36 Biol. or ecol.
39 Prom piece
40 Foments
42 Pest greeting
43 Vegas game with rolls
44 Raise, as a flag
45 Battle royale
46 George Peppard TV series, with "The"
47 Mode of fashion
49 "I'll ____ my time"
50 Hang on tight?
51 "Last ____" (The Strokes song)
52 Tablet owner
54 Prefix with information
55 ____ nutshell

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WE RECOMMEND...

STATEWIDE ENTERTAINMENT LISTINGS

Music, Performances and Events Across Montana

MONTANA BOOK EVENTS

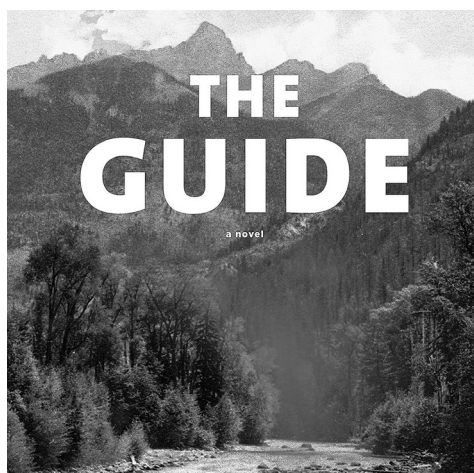
PETER HELLER

Tues., Sept. 7 - 7 p.m.

Fact and Fiction - Missoula

The best-selling author of "The River" returns with a heart-racing thriller about a young man who is hired by an elite fishing lodge in Colorado. In "The Guide," the protagonist uncovers a plot of shocking menace amid the natural beauty of sun-drenched streams and forests.

Info: FactandFictionBooks.com.



RAY MCPADDEN AND DAVID ABRAMS

Wed., Sept. 8 - 7:30 pm

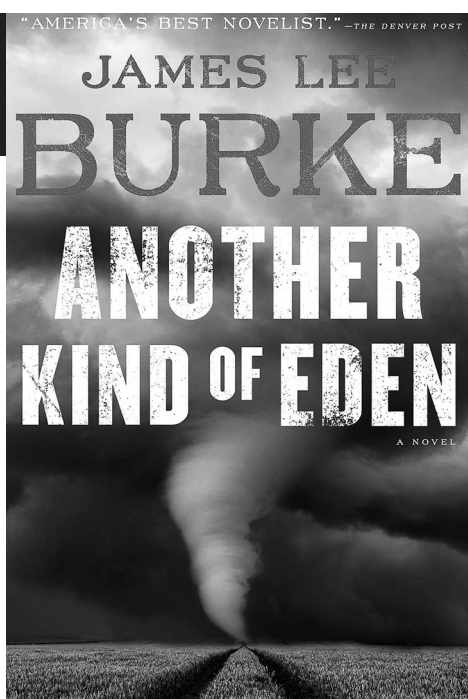
Two military veterans turned writers discuss online "We March at Midnight: A War Memoir," a fast-paced account of former Army Ranger Ray McPadden's experiences in the Iraq and Afghan Wars. For info: CountryBookshelf.com.

JERRY ENSLER

Tues., Sept. 7 - 12 p.m.

Wed., Sept 8 - 12 p.m. and 6 p.m.

Author Jerry Ensler is touring the state to talk about his new biography, "Jim Bridger: Trailblazer of the American West," the first comprehensive biography of the legendary western figure in more than 50 years. A Sept. 7 program will be held at the Clark Chateau in Butte at 12 p.m.; a Sept. 8 program will be held the Missoula Public Library in Copper Room "A" on the 4th Floor at 12 p.m. and Ensler will also present a program on the new book at Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman on the same day at 6:30 p.m. Info: MissoulaPublicLibrary.com.



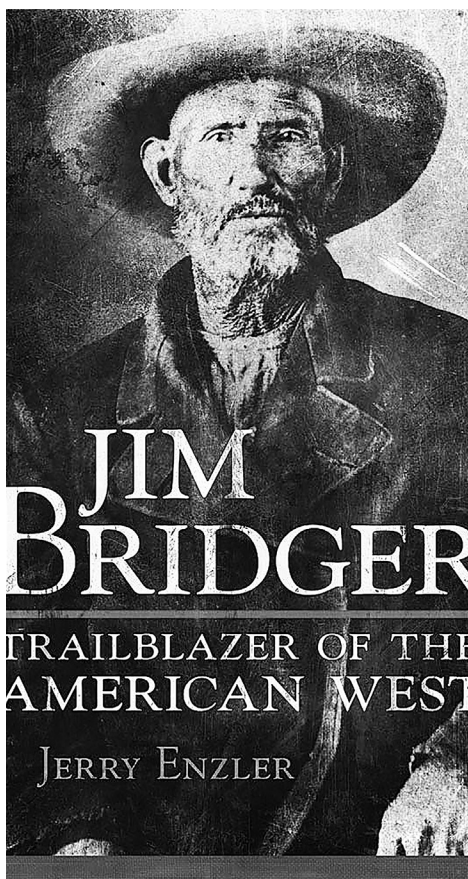
JAMES LEE BURKE

Thurs., Sept. 9 - 6:45 p.m.

Fact and Fiction - Missoula

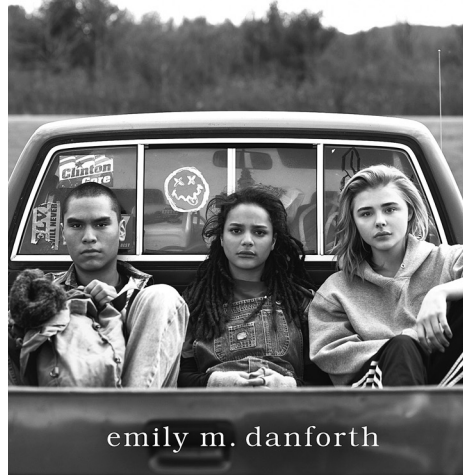
Author Burke will be doing a live, in-person event to discuss his new work, "Another Kind of Eden," the latest installment in his Holland family saga examining the myths of both the twentieth-century American West and the peace-and-love decade. Doors will open at 6:45 p.m. and seating/capacity is limited (no advance ticketing). Masks will be required.

Info: FactandFictionBooks.com.



NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

The Miseducation of Cameron Post



emily m. danforth

UM AUTHOR BOOK CLUB

Online - Sept. 15, 2021

Casey Charles, UM Professor, discusses Emily Danforth's debut novel, "The Miseducation Of Cameron Post." Danforth has an MFA in Fiction from the University of Montana and a Ph.D. in English-Creative Writing from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her debut novel has been translated into seven languages, was a finalist for the American Library Association's Morris Debut Award and won the 2012 Montana Book Award.

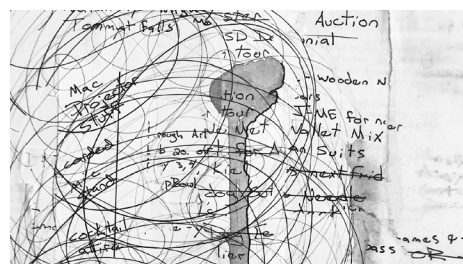
Info: GrizAlum.org.

KING ARTHUR REMIXED

Thurs., Sept. 16 - 7:30 p.m.

Adventure into the murky mythology of King Arthur and the Knights of Camelot with actors of Arthuriana re-imaginings released this year.

EK Johnston takes the story of the Fisher King to space in "Aetherbound." Kiersten White reinvents Guinevere in the "Camelot Rising" trilogy. Preeti Chhibber contributes to an anthology of gender-bent, race-bent, LGBTQIA+ inclusive retellings in "Sword Stone Table." And The Lady of Shalott reclaims her story in a bold feminist reimagining from Laura Sebastian with "Half Sick of Shadows." Register online at CountryBookshelf.com.

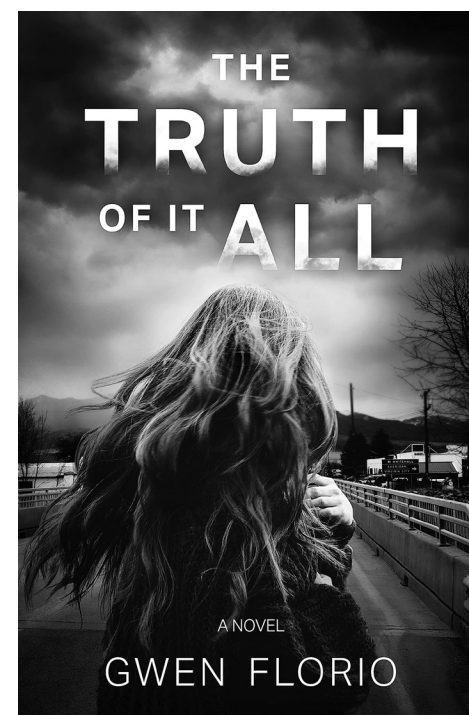


POETRY JAM WITH ANNA PAGE

Wed., Sept. 22 - 7 p.m.

Kirks' Grocery - Billings

Pairing words with sound, voice, and instrumentation every fourth Wednesday. Info: KirksGrocery.com.



GWEN FLORIO

Thurs., Sept. 23 - 7 p.m.

Fact and Fiction - Missoula

Award-winning journalist Florio turned to fiction in 2013 with the publication of her first novel, "Montana," which won the Pinckley Prize for crime fiction and a High Plains Book Award. Her new book, "The Truth of It All" is the first in a series featuring public defender Julia Geary. Doors will open at 6:45 p.m. and seating/capacity is limited (no advance ticketing). Masks will be required.

Info: FactandFictionBooks.com.

THE GRIZZLY IN THE DRIVEWAY



THE RETURN OF BEARS TO A CROWDED AMERICAN WEST



ROBERT CHANEY

ROB CHANEY

Sat., Sept. 25 - 1:30 p.m.

Billings Public Library

Montana journalist and author Chaney discusses "The Grizzly in the Driveway," a book mixing fast-paced storytelling with details about the hidden lives of grizzly bears, and chronicling the resurgence of this charismatic species against the backdrop of the country's long history with the bear. Info: BillingsLibrary.org.



MONTANA BOOK FESTIVAL
EVENTS KICK OFF ON SEPTEMBER 16!

Virtual events begin September 16 and continue weekends throughout September and October.

For more information about participating authors, featured titles, scheduled events and virtual registration links, visit the website.
WWW.MONTANABOOKFESTIVAL.COM

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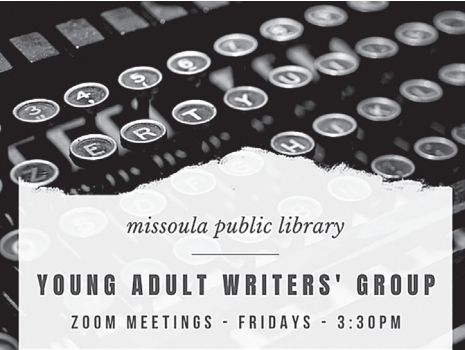
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missoula public library
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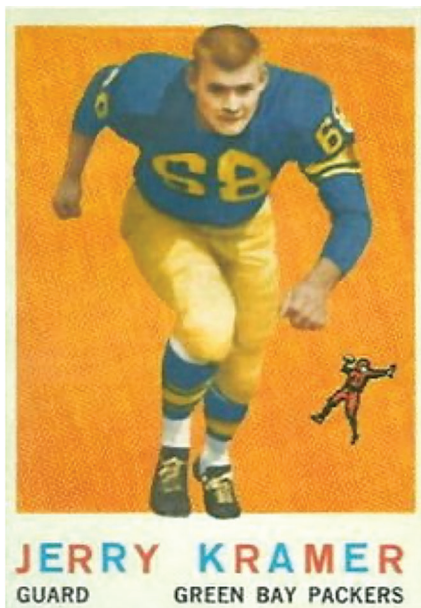


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FAMOUS AND NOT FORGOTTEN: FOOTBALL LEGEND JERRY KRAMER



Jerry Kramer is probably best known for playing with the Green Bay Packers in the first-ever AFL-NFL World Championship Game on January 15, 1967 at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. The legendary game was known retroactively as Super Bowl I and referred to in contemporaneous reports, including the game's radio broadcast, as the "Super Bowl."

The National Football League (NFL) champion Green Bay Packers defeated the American Football League (AFL) champion Kansas City Chiefs by the score of 35-10. The Packers defended their title in 1968 at the Orange Bowl in Miami, defeating the AFL champion Oakland Raiders by the score of 33-14.

With Kramer at right guard, the Green Bay Packers won five NFL titles and the first two Super Bowls. He was also the team's place-kicker in 1962, 1963 and part of 1968.

Any discussion of Kramer's career is also likely to include mention of the epic contests in which Kramer participated, clutch games such as the 1967 Ice Bowl in which he cleared the path for quarterback Bart Starr to score the game-winning touchdown, and his deep relationship with his coach, the legendary Vince Lombardi.

MONTANA ROOTS

Overlooked in the old game films and sometimes forgotten in Packers' history are Jerry Kramer's Eastern Montana roots. Kramer was born on January 23, 1936, in Jordan, arguably one of the most isolated communities in the state.

"My dad was not a college-educated guy, but a self-educated one," says Kramer, 85, now living in Boise, Idaho. "My father was a



strict German. He got to be quite a religious guy and studied his Bible. He had a short-temper, and he got your attention pretty quick with the strap."

"We lived in the town of Jordan, and we went through the Depression and my dad worked for the WPA (Works Progress Administration) and that pumped the money into the community and the economy."

Jerry Kramer is also related to a pair of memorable Eastern Montana personalities.

"There are two Hall of Famers in the Kramer family in Montana," he explains. Bobbie Brooks Kramer (1913-2005) was inducted into the Cowgirl Hall of Fame and Corwin "Bud" Kramer (1913-1979) was inducted into the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame last year.

"Bobbie and Bud Brooks were married, and I remember Bud as a cowboy and me running along as he was on his high-riding pony... trying to get alongside and Bud saying, 'You will ride on the pull of my boot if you don't shut up and pull away!' Bud had a big ranch in Cohagen, a 150,000-acre ranch, that was half BLM (Bureau of Land Management) and half the Cohagen boys."

Kramer's family left Jordan when he was five, but he still remembers a series of little hills they called the "Toy Mountains," and even at the age of three or four, he would run up and down those hills with his siblings. He also recalls camping out and catching catfish on the Missouri River.

There was some boyish mischief, too. "I set grandpa's house on fire after I discovered matches and tar paper and I lit it up," he recalls. "I remember I created a lot of havoc."

Then there was the time, at the age of five, when he "became quite smitten" with one of his cousins, a girl by the name of Donna.

"I wanted to buy her something but I had no money, so I went to the local garage to see if he had anything I could help out with. He was using horsehair stuffing. He told me about an old dead horse two miles down the road and he sent me to cut the hair off of it. That horse stunk. I walked out there and I cut the mane and the tail and stuffed it in a paper bag, hustled to the garage, and I made a nickel."

"I grabbed a brown sack at the drugstore, and bought candy, five or ten for a nickel, and planned on visiting Donna. I walked out of the drugstore but Donna and her family were driving past me, heading to Roundup."

Jerry Kramer displays two of the three pieces of wood which were removed from his groin in surgery in 1965. The splinters had been embedded in his groin for 11 and a half years. Soon after, he reclaimed his starting position as right guard with the Packers and went on to win three straight NFL titles and the first two Super Bowls.



STANDOUT PLAYER

Kramer, his parents and his five siblings left Jordan and spent about a year in Helena, where his father attended an electronics school.

The family later moved to Utah and then to Sandpoint, Idaho.

An accident in the summer of 1953 occurred when Kramer was chasing a calf on his family's farm and the calf stepped on a board, shattering it and shooting a lance-shaped splinter of wood into Kramer's abdomen; after piercing his abdomen, the splinter partially exited Kramer's back between two vertebrae. Doctors cut the piece in two and pulled it out front and back; two weeks later, Kramer was at pre-season football practice at Sandpoint High School for his senior season but the injury would continue to plague him for years.

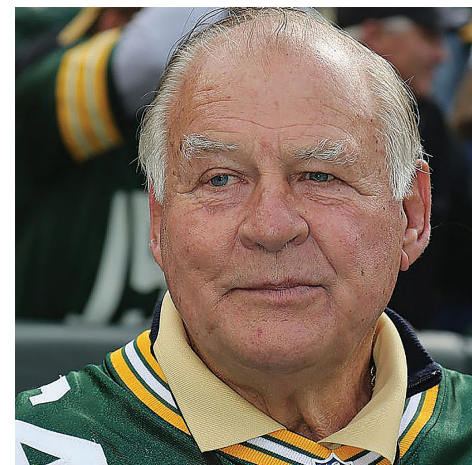
After his graduation from Sandpoint High School in 1954, Kramer was a standout player for the University of Idaho Vandals, becoming the school's first All-American in 1956 and 1957. The team later retired his uniform number, 64. Kramer kept the same number when he got to Green Bay.

Kramer was the 39th selection of the 1958 NFL draft, taken in the fourth round by the Packers. As a professional offensive lineman, his excellence was so enduring, and the Packers' victories so routine, that he perhaps didn't always get the appreciation he deserved.

The Packers guard played for \$8,000 (about \$75,000 in 2021 dollars) in his first season in Green Bay, a staggering number compared to current NFL contracts that can skyrocket to the many millions of dollars. The average player at the time was receiving less than \$6,000 per season and standards for a base salary for all players of about \$9,000 only won recognition in 1970.

Kramer played on five Green Bay Packers championship teams (1961, 1962, 1965, 1966, and 1967) and earned rings in the first two Super Bowls (1967 and 1968).

Kramer was noteworthy for overcoming a series of accidents and health issues prior to and during his professional football career. The most serious was in 1964; he played the first



two games, then missed the rest of the season, later diagnosed at the Mayo Clinic with actinomycosis (invasive bacterial disease)

In May 1965, Kramer finally had removal surgery for a wood fragment still remaining in his body from the 1953 farm accident. Soon thereafter, he reclaimed his starting position as right guard with the Packers and went on to win three straight NFL titles and the first two Super Bowls.

Kramer retired from football in 1968 and became involved in a wide variety of business endeavors, including projects in oil and gas exploration. He last traveled through Eastern Montana about 12 years ago, he says, on the way to have a look at Williston, ND, the center of the Bakken oil boom.

"My two sons, Matt and Jordan, he's named after Jordan, Montana, worked in the industry about ten years ago, and one is still involved," he explains.

Matt and Jordan Kramer, also played college football at the University of Idaho. Jordan, named after the Montana town in which Jerry Kramer was born, played two seasons in the NFL as a linebacker with the Tennessee Titans in 2003 and 2004.

STILL ON THE FIELD

Despite the strain of enduring approximately 22 major operations, Kramer says that he still moves about with vigor. "I exercise and try to eat fruit and be really more involved intellectually in the world. I still have a curiosity about things."

"Several years ago, I thought about starting an anti-aging clinic. I'm interested in stem cells, and I read scientific journals and keep track of the advancements in the industry. I have had several stem-cell injections, and I chew that stuff up. I believe that having the brain active burns up energy and calories and may burn up the substances that clog your mind when you have dementia problems."

Kramer was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2018.

"I really enjoyed the game, and it's been a wonderful ride," he says. "I had limited expectations coming from Montana and later Sandpoint, and thus I didn't really understand what was happening."

"I didn't know how to negotiate, or how to discuss what I might be worth. I didn't maximize that position. But the game still rewarded me with recognition and wonderful moments—far beyond anything I could have imagined as a youngster." ★

—BRIAN D'AMBROSIO



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COVELLITE THEATRE - BUTTE

Starting as a Russian group and playing what they dubbed "Siberian Surf Rock," this band has included musicians from all over the world including the U.S., Israel, Kazakhstan, Puerto Rico and Bulgaria. At the newly-reopened Covellite Theatre on Fri., Sept. 10 at 7 p.m. For info: CovelliteTheatre.com.



RED LODGE OKTOBERFEST

Save the date Sat., Sept. 11, and get your dirndls and lederhosen ready, Red Lodge Oktoberfest has returned! Join Red Lodge Ales for this 23rd annual celebration—German food and beer, vendors and games at Red Lodge Ales Brewing Company. For info: RedLodgeAles.com.

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ARIES (March 21-April 19): Aries poet Anna Kamienska wrote, "I've learned to value failed conversations, missed connections, confusions. What remains is what's unsaid, what's underneath. Understanding on another level of being." In the coming weeks, I suggest you adopt her perspective as you evaluate both past and present experiences. You're likely to find small treasures in what you'd assumed were wastelands. You may uncover inspiring clues in plot twists that initially frustrated you. Upon further examination, interludes you dismissed as unimportant or uninteresting could reveal valuable wrinkles.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): After studying your astrological omens, I've decided to offer you inspiration from the ancient Roman poet Catullus. I hope the extravagant spirit of his words will free you to be greedy for the delights of love and affection. Catullus wrote, "Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred; then another thousand, then a second hundred; then yet another thousand." I'll add the following to Catullus's appeal: Seek an abundance of endearing words, sweet favors and gifts, caresses and massages, help with your work, and fabulous orgasms. If there's no one in your life to provide you with such blessings, give them to yourself.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Gemini author Elif Batuman writes that the Old Uzbek language was rich in expressions about crying. There were "words for wanting to cry and not being able to, for loudly crying like thunder in the clouds, for crying in gasps, for weeping inwardly or secretly, for crying ceaselessly in a high voice, for crying in hiccups, and for crying while uttering the sound 'hay hay.'" I recommend all of these to you in the coming days, as well as others you might dream up. Why? It's prime time to seek the invigorating release and renewal that come from shedding tears generated by deep and mysterious feelings.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): A blogger named MythWoven imagines an "alternate universe where I literally go to school forever (for free) so I can learn about art and literature and history and languages for 100 years. No job skills. No credit requirements. No student loans. Just learning." I have longings like hers. There's an eternal student within me that wants to be endlessly surprised with exciting information about interesting subjects. I would love to be continually adding fresh skills and aptitudes to my repertoire. In the coming weeks, I will give free rein to that part of me. I recommend you do the same, my fellow Cancerian.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): In 2016, the International Garden Photograph of the Year depicted lush lupine flowers in New Zealand. The sea of tall purple, pink, and blue blooms was praised as "an elegant symphony" and "a joy to behold." What the judges didn't mention is that lupine is an invasive species in New Zealand. It forces native plant species out of their habitat, which in turn drives away native animal species, including birds like the wrybill, black stilt, and banded dotterel. Is there a metaphorically comparable phenomenon in your life, Leo? Problematic beauty? Some influence that's both attractive and prickly? A wonderful thing that can also be troublesome? The coming weeks will be a favorable time to try to heal the predicament.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): "I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all," wrote Virgo author Jean Rhys (1890-1979). I don't think you will be agitated by those questions during the next eight weeks, Virgo. In fact, I suspect you will feel as secure in your identity as you have in a long time. You will enjoy prolonged clarity about your role in the world, the nature of your desires, and how you should plan your life for the next two years. If for some inexplicable reason you're not already enjoying these developments, stop what you're doing and meditate on the probability that I am telling you the bold truth.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Several states in the US have statutes prohibiting blasphemy. Saying "God damn it" could theoretically get you fined in Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Wyoming. In the coming days, it's best to proceed carefully in places like those, since you've been authorized by cosmic forces to curse more often and more forcefully than usual. Why? Because you need to summon vivid and intense protests in the face of influences that may be inhibiting and infringing on your soul's style. You have a poetic license to rebel against conventions that oppress you.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Everyone dreams at least three dreams per night. In a year, your subconscious mind generates over 1,100 dreams. About this remarkable fact, novelist Mila Kundera writes, "Dreaming is not merely an act of coded communication. It is also an aesthetic activity, a game that is a value in itself. To dream about things that have not happened is among humanity's deepest needs." I bring this to your attention, Scorpio, because September is Honor Your Dreams Month. To celebrate, I suggest the following experiments. 1. Every night before sleep, write down a question you'd like your dreams to respond to. 2. Keep a notebook by your bed and transcribe at least one dream each time you sleep. 3. In the morning, have fun imagining what the previous night's dreams might be trying to communicate to you. 4. Say prayers of gratitude to your dreams, thanking them for their provocative, entertaining stories.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): In her autobiography Changing, Sagittarian actor Liv Ullmann expresses grief about how she and a loved one failed to communicate essential truths to each other. I propose we regard her as your anti-role model for the rest of 2021. Use her error as your inspiration. Make emotionally intelligent efforts to talk about unsaid things that linger like ghostly puzzles between you and those you care about.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): "I could do with a bit more excess," writes author Joanne Harris. "From now on I'm going to be immoderate—and volatile," she vows. "I shall enjoy loud music and lurid poetry. I shall be rampant." Let me be clear, Capricorn: I'm not urging you to be immoderate, volatile, excessive, and rampant every day for the rest of your long life. But I think you will generate health benefits and good fortune if you experiment with that approach in the coming weeks. Can you think of relatively sane, sensible ways to give yourself this salubrious luxury?

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): While wading through the internet's wilder terrain, I found a provocative quote alleged to have been uttered by the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates. He supposedly said, "My ultimate goal is to look totally hot, but not be unapproachable." I confess that in the past I have sometimes been fooled by fake quotes, and I suspect this is one. Still, it's amusing to entertain the possibility that such an august personage as Socrates, a major influencer of Western culture, might say something so cute and colloquial. Even if he didn't actually say it, I like the idea of blending ancient wisdom with modern insights, seriousness with silliness, thoughtful analysis with good fun. In accordance with astrological omens, I recommend you experiment with comparable hybrids in the coming weeks. (PS: One of your goals should be to look totally hot, but not be unapproachable.)

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): "If you don't know what you want," writes Piscean novelist Chuck Palahniuk, "you end up with a lot you don't." Very true! And right now, it's extra important to keep that in mind. During the coming weeks, you'll be at the peak of your ability to attract what you want and need. Wouldn't you prefer to gather influences you really desire—as opposed to those for which you have mild or zero interest? Define your wants and needs very precisely.

THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK: *What's your greatest blessing? Tesify at newsletter@freewillastrology.com.*

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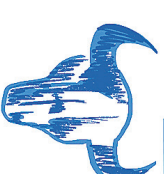
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