

# ALBERTA Street News



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# ALBERTA STREET NEWS

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Cover photo: The 37th Annual Santa Claus Fund Toy Run had threenotables out helping to promote the cause left to right are, Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede Queen, Emma Atkinson, Santa Clause and Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede Princess Caitlyn O'Connor  
Photo By John Zapantis

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**The views expressed are  
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# Alberta Street News marks 20 years

By Linda Dumont

The first issue of Alberta Street News, then under the name Edmonton Street News, went on sale on November 16, 2003, following a book launch at the Lighthouse Mission on the corner of 103A Avenue and 95 Street.

I was fascinated by street newspapers from the day I first saw one at the old Christ Love Mission, where I was running a soup kitchen. I was renting the main floor of a suite in a house owned by Virginia Behr. She was notorious as a slum landlady, but she was always good to me. She had renovations done to the suite, adding a third sink in the kitchen, and new linoleum without cracks, so we could pass the health inspection and be licensed to serve food.

The ministry was located on what was then called drug alley, that street running east from the old York Hotel. Two doors west George the Satanist had a boarding house for his followers. The satanists would come by for soup, and I told my volunteers to serve them with respect and courtesy because God loves them as much as he loves us. I told the satanists they were serving the wrong master if they had to come to me for food. They kept saying they were going to get rid of the 'Jesus House' and did things to bug us like playing deafeningly loud heavy metal music on outdoor speakers when we were open. You had to walk through a wall of sound to enter the building. They burned a Bible on the sidewalk beside the house, and left a dead cat in the yard. We just carried on and ignored it all.

That Christmas I decided to have a turkey dinner for the people from the street. I rented the community hall, organized volunteers and food, and a program with music, skits and a speaker every half hour giving a gospel message. That worked well, because as soon as the preacher started, people, who had eaten, left, leaving room for more to be seated. The last speaker of the day was evangelist Barry Plamondon. When he gave the altar call, George went up to the front. It wasn't long before George had converted to Christianity, and his followers were disbanded.

It was George who showed me a street newspaper - Spare Change from Vancouver, that was being distributed in Edmonton through the Bissell Centre. The paper served a double purpose - it gave a voice the poor and it provided employment. What the poor need most is not programming, or handouts, but money. George sold enough papers to buy himself an old truck. I thought is he can do it, so can I.

I got my first twenty papers and became a vendor two weeks later. When the Bissell Centre decided to hire an editor to publish an Edmonton version of Spare Change, I was right there offering to write a regular column for the new paper. Spare Change became Our Voice and ran for the next ten years. I wrote in nearly every issue of that paper.

But I wanted to be more than a writer. I wanted to be an editor. To that end, I enrolled in Grant McEwan College and studied first Native Communications, then Journalism. But there was no need for another street paper, so I got the job of editor of Boyle McCauley news, which I held for seven years. By 2003 things were changing. The end was nearing for Our Voice. The Bissell Centre decided to drop the program. Our Voice struggled on for a few more years as an independent paper, but then fizzled out.

Anticipating the changes to come, I held a meeting at the La Dolce Vita Café, with Rodney Graham, editor of Winnipeg Street Sheet, and Natasha Lauwrence, former editor of Our Voice, and we came up with a plan for a new paper. For the first year, Natasha was editor and I was designer and publisher as well as a writer. At its height I was printing 7000 papers a month, with nearly 30 vendors selling on the streets.

In 2011, The Calgary street paper, Calgary Street Talk, folded. Robert Champion, a writer and vendor for street talk, approached me to have Edmonton Street News sold in Calgary. I drove to Calgary for a meeting, and brought him his first batch of papers. He had several other Calgary vendors who also wanted to sell the paper.

Because the paper was being sold in Calgary as well as Edmonton, a decision was made to change the name from Edmonton Street News to Alberta Street News. We invited the media to a name change event at my house. John Zapantis sent notices to all the local media, and there were cars with cameras and reporters lined up all along the street - 13 of them.

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# No is for November

by Joanne Bengler

Older readers will remember when the abbreviation for November was Nov. With the computer age it became No. It is now our eleventh month but was named Novem when it was the Roman ninth month. In many European nations November was slaughter month when animals were slain and salted down for winter use. It was called Slaghtmaand in Holland and Blot-monath in England. It was also known as Wind-monath in England and it was Brumaire (fog-month) in the French Republican Calendar where it ran from October 23 to November 21.

November is National Literacy Month, Empty Nester Month, Diabetes Month, and National Epilepsy Month. November is also Family Violence Prevention Month. During this month display a purple light to show your support of victims of domestic violence. It is also Movember when Calgary-Edmonton beard-growing challenges bring attention to men's health. Fat squirrels in November mean a bad winter to come and all ships should stop sailing for the year for ice is coming. The saying is, "November take flail so let no ship sail."

Nov. 1 is All Saints Day or Hallow Day from the old English word halig, a holy man or saint. The first celebration was May 1, 610, a celebration dedicated to all martyrs. It was changed to Nov. 1 in 834. Fireworks represent the souls going up to heaven. Nov. 2 is All Souls Day when we celebrate the less saintly who will eventually get to heaven, we hope.

Nov. 3 is Sandwich Day. The fourth Earl of Sandwich (1718-1792), also known as Jemmy Twitcher, was so busy gambling he had no time to eat a proper meal so he asked the waiter to bring him a piece of ham between two slices of bread and the sandwich was invented, or so the story goes. Nov. 4, the first Saturday of the month, is Sadie Hawkins Day when the gals can ask the guys for a dance or a date.

Nov. 5 Daylight Saving Time ends so we get an extra hour of sleep. It is also Guy Fawkes Day so you can spend that extra hour enjoying a bonfire and fireworks.

Nov. 8 is National Indigenous Veterans' Day, Nov. 11 is Remembrance Day, and Nov. 12, the second Sunday in November, is Veterans' Day. The week surrounding them, Nov. 5 to 11, is Veterans' Week. Canada remembers. Wear your poppy and attend Remembrance Day ceremonies.

Nov. 12 is the Sikh holiday of Bandj-Chhor Divas as well as the Hindu Diwali.

Nov. 13 -19 is Metis Week. Let us honour the new Otipemisiwak Metis Government, drafted in Aug, 2022. Otipemisiwak is a Cree word used to describe Metis. It means: "people who govern themselves."

Nov. 15 is World Philanthropy Day as well as National Bundt Pan Day. Nov. 20 is International Children's Day as well as Transgender Day of Remembrance, and Nov. 21 is World Hello Day. Greet everyone you meet

Nov. 25 the 16 days of Activism Against Gender Violence begin.

Nov. 23 is U.S. Thanksgiving Day, which many see as the beginning of the Christmas season. The Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Harbour on Dec. 12, 1620 and celebrated their first and only Thanksgiving with the Wampanoag a year later. Their king, Massasoit, arrived with 90 men and they feasted together for three days. Edward Winslow, one of the Pilgrims, wrote that Massasoit's men killed three deer and the Pilgrims sent four men fowling and got enough fowl to last a week. Nov. 24 is Black Friday when people start their Christmas shopping. Some people do the Johnny Cash thing and dress all in black for Black Friday. Nov. 27 is Cyber Monday when the shopping frenzy continues on line. This is followed by Giving Tuesday when the thankful give back.

Nov. 28, Giving Tuesday, has evolved into the world's largest generosity movement. Over 80 countries take part each year and Canada has 47 active community movements. In 2022 over 43 and a half million dollars were given to charities and non-profits across Canada.

Nov. 27 is Full Moon, the Hunting or Indian Summer Moon. Look up into the sky once more for Nov. 28 is Red Planet Day. Eat a Mars bar.

## Alberta Street News - continued from page 2

Times were changing. The paper provided an income to those with insufficient income, and many of the vendors were receiving money from AISH, When AISH rates were raised to nearly double what they had been, about half of the vendors quit selling. Then, in 2020 COVID 19 shut everything down. No more vendors on the street, no more papers sales. I kept the paper going as an online paper, and the writers kept on writing, but that spelled the beginning of the end. The world has been changed by the pandemic. Sales never picked up and currently there are only a handful of vendors selling on the streets.

Last year we had the papers archived at the university so they can take their place in history, but the street newspaper movement, born in the 90s, is coming to a close. Many papers overseas have gone digital, and others are programs of the government. It's a vastly changed world. But we carry on.



# Just say no to the APP and referendums

By Timothy Wild

My family comes from the north-west of England and stems from English and Irish stock. In terms of religious beliefs there were Roman Catholics, atheists, Methodists, and members of the Church of England in the family. The jobs of my ancestors included coal miners, merchant seamen, textile workers, local government labourers, housekeepers for Parish Priests and soldiers (generally privates).

Certainly, a lot of diversity in terms of identities. But there was one common theme: my family was solidly working class. They endured the highs and frequent lows of capitalism in Industrial Britain and, based on this experience, developed an active class consciousness and collective disposition that eventually led to the election of Labour in 1945 and the creation of the welfare state. A large part of the agenda of the Labour welfare state was to promote measures that supported the dignity and participation of the working class and ensure a reduction in the brutal unpredictability of capitalist economic cycles.

This was sorely needed. I remember my Mum talking about how afraid some of her much older relatives had been about ending up in the “poorhouse”. The poorhouses and workhouses were part of the Poor Law system (implemented in both Britain and the maritime colonies of British North America) and provided “indoor relief” for the economically marginalized of the day. The “poor” were divided into two categories: those expected to work and those not expected to work. Generally, those expected to work, apart from seasonal workers, usually regarded as “idlers”, were put to work in the workhouses on a variety of mundane and punitive tasks, such as unpicking the fibres of hemp rope and breaking large stones into pebbles. Those not expected to work could live in the poorhouse and survive on a meagre diet and inhospitable living conditions. For the most part, those not expected to work included abandoned or unwed mothers, young children, people

with a broad range of disabilities and older adults, particularly women. People outside of the workforce.

These workhouses (usually) kept people alive. But they were degrading places, where a person’s inherent humanity was left at the door. It is no wonder that folks wanted to avoid the poorhouse at all costs. However, it wasn’t as easy as that and people who were poor during their younger lives tended to be poor as older adults. The poorhouses also provided a graphic reminder of the results of the tragic intersection of gender, age and class for low-income people and their families. The spectre of the Poor Laws, whether implicit or explicit, continues to have an influence on social policy development today in postindustrial capitalist societies.

That said, there have been advances, particularly for “deserving groups”. Public pensions, for example, have helped ensure a modest level of living for older people in Canada and have been a significant anti-poverty measure. From the introduction of limited pensions after World War One and in the 1920s (due to the role of labour MPs in the parliament) to the development of the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), social policy has ensured that the fear of institutionalized poorhouses is largely thing of the past. Certainly, there is significant wealth and income disparity amongst the over 65 population. And poverty continues to exist amongst our country’s older adults, particularly single older women. Many lower-income folk cannot make adequate contributions to RRSPs and other retirement financial vehicles that can augment the state system. Not many of us are assured the benefits of a defined-benefit contribution. Still, the public pension system in Canada was – and in many ways still is – a notable public policy success. Not perfect, but an advance.

However, the recent musings of our provincial government could serve to undermine the collective and individual benefits of public pensions in both Alberta and the rest of English-speaking Canada. In August, the Provincial Government released the flashy document “Alberta Pension Plan – Analysis of costs, benefits, risks and considerations”, which explored the possibility of Alberta withdrawing from the CPP, taking a substan-

tial amount of money from the Fund and creating a stand-alone Alberta Pension Plan.

The idea is wrong for so many reasons and is driven mostly by the twin propellers of a stale ideology and an Alberta Exceptionalism. Such a move would put the residual CPP into significant trouble and would have an impact on the retirement wellbeing of our fellow citizens outside of Quebec. I suppose my basic concern is that if the CPP isn’t broken, why leave it? It is an actuarially sound pension and is used as a model for public pensions around the world. Additionally, I don’t trust the provincial government to handle my pension. I would be worried where they would choose to invest and would be concerned that the pension funds could be used to invest in non-renewable resources to the detriment of our province’s environment. I fear that public pension funds would be used for political and ideological purposes; and rather than invest public funds in ethical and sustainable options the money would be used to promote an atavistic economic and political agenda. I also don’t have much confidence in Alberta’s fund management agency who have a recent history of losses when dealing with public funds. From my point of view, there are lots of reasons to suggest that the APP is a bad idea.

But rationality don’t always mesh with politics. And it seems that the UCP Government might use a referendum to determine whether or not an APP should be pursued. I think the mantra of lower premiums, higher returns would resonate with lots of people. If it was true, it would certainly resonate with me. But I am not sure that it is true – despite the propaganda and skewed construction of the APP survey and the massive ad campaign. Yet, if that mantra is minted into a simple yes or no referendum question, it might very well appeal to voters. Put bluntly, though, I don’t think the simple yes / no of a referendum should be used to provide direction on complex and complicated issues. I think the David Cameron’s folly with Brexit is a solid example of the inherent problems of simple referendums to provide an answer to complex policy issues.

My point is that we don’t need an APP to help older adults in retirement. The current pension system already plays that role. Can it be made more adequate? For

sure it can, particularly if the GIS and OAS amounts are increased. We can also ensure that income before retirement is adequate enough to allow folks the opportunity to invest in ancillary retirement vehicles such as RRSPs.

I would argue that it is not the wellbeing of older folks in Alberta that is causing this unnecessary pursuit of a provincial plan. I would suggest, instead, that it is related to external forces, such as the growth of

Take Back Alberta and their small government, pro free enterprise (supported by public funds) Alberta exceptionalist agenda. Perhaps Premier Smith is attempting to ward of their influence with this ruse; similar, perhaps, to David Cameron's attempt to undermine the growing influence of the UKIP? Frequently, however, these political tosses of the dice don't turn out well. And I think we need to keep this in mind when we are looking at messing with our effective and efficient model of public pensions.

The basic annual income of the CPP / GIS and OAS works. Let's build from that and use it as a foundation to ensure that all older adults have a measure of dignity and inclusion. Let's not return to the bad old days of individual provision, working-class marginalization, poorhouses and gruel. Let's not mess with a good thing. Just say "no" to the APP.

## Some Christmas Riddles

by Joanne Bengier

Q. How does Santa get rid of bad elves? A. He gives them the heave-ho-ho.

Q. Why did Santa visit the chiropractor? A. He had a chim knee.

Q. Why do families fight the day after Christmas? A. It is Boxing Day.

Q. Why doesn't Santa use the door-bell? A. He prefers a gift wrap at the door.

Q. Why are the elves so short? A. They eat Christmas shortbread.

Q. How can you avoid Christmas traffic? A. Stay at home.

Q. What do you call a Christmas turkey the day after Christmas? A. Either Lucky or left-overs.

Q. Why did the turkey cross the road? A. It was the chicken's day off.

Q. Why did the turkey dislike Boxing Day? A. He was going cold turkey.

Q. Why couldn't the elf buy presents? A. He

was short (of money).

Q. With what does Santa scratch his lottery tickets? A. With his Santa claws.

Q. Why does Santa hold children on his lap? A. He comes from Lapland.

Q. What does the mother kangaroo get for Christmas? A. A hoodie with kangaroo pockets.

Q. What Olympic sport do Santa and the elves participate in at the North Pole? A. The pole vault.

Q. What do you call a popular perfume given as a Christmas present? A. A best smeller.

Q. What do you call a happy girl yodelling in the Alps at Christmas-time? A. A Merry Swiss Miss.

## Bye, Bye Birdy

By Angelue Branston

When I was a young teenager, my mom had saved up enough money to buy me a pony. You see I grew up on various farms across Alberta, the frequent moves of an abusive man trying to outrun his own demons....but when the demon is yourself you have to keep moving. We raised goats and much to my dismay chickens (when I was two years old I was attacked by leghorn chickens so I have a fear of birds). My brother and I each had a pet goat, my little sister was only two years old at the time so she did not have her own pet goat yet.

At this time we were living on a farm just outside of Elk Point. A few farms earlier I had been in 4H club and horse back riding club. We were renting the land to a man for his horses, as well as feeding and exercising them, so I would ride my horse the four or so miles to the ranch to learn how to ride horses better. They would take my horse, who was sweating, and wipe it down and walk it then let it rest, and give me a horse to ride for few hours I was there. I loved riding horses. It was exhilarating. But I digress.

It was beautiful country by Elk point, rolling hills and lush green bushes, with areas of marsh and bogs so the wildlife was diverse and the land filled with many flowers and berries for foraging. My mom comforted me many nights as I cried about missing the horses and the riding club. The only problem with buying the horse was all money transactions had to go through my exfather. He bought me the pony (with my mom's money), who was

retired and stubborn and who could not be ridden without being bucked off unless someone led the pony.

I still loved the silly old pony, I called him Birdy. My mom made the best of things and would often take me and my little sister for walks on Birdy. She would walk for miles gently leading Birdy who was always very calm around my mom and sister and myself. She had studied the plants of Alberta, so she would point at or stop and help us off the pony so we could look closely at the berries or plants and taste the berries. There is nothing in nature that we need to be afraid of, we need to understand and be respectful. Then she would help us back up onto Birdy and the walk would continue.

My little sister loved eating the berries, and she must have remembered the route we took because one morning she disappeared. We found her a mile away, sitting by a patch of berries happily eating them. She gave a big smile and said "eat berries". .. no one was mad, we were all just relieved that she was found and safe.

The days of Elk point were filled with wonder and joy. My mother and little sister were two bright lights. I learned the love of nature, and God. My nights are for another story. . .

The demise of my pony came a few years later. I took care of him as best I could, I walked him by myself since my mom and sister had moved out. I stayed for my pony, used as a tool by my exfather. I could not trim his hooves. Rather than having the vet come and trim them, Gerald waited until Birdy foundered. His hooves were over grown and needed many vet visits. it was cheaper for him to sell my pony. Not even put down humanly by a vet, but sold to a glue factory and killed. Gerald threw a party and told me then.

I mourned for Birdy and prayed for him. The one and only good thing that came from Birdy's death was my freedom. Gerald held nothing over me anymore. My mother was living in an apartment on welfare ( having severe ptsd ) but you see, one can live in complete deprivation with loved ones, and be happy for if ones soul and emotions are nourished the hunger pangs are easily quieted. My exfather had a very good paying governmental job, an acerage, but a life filled with isolation, fear, and control.

Birdy is missed, the silly stubborn pony, may he rest in peace.

# Remembrance Day

by Joanne Bengier



We wear poppies every Remembrance Day to honour our veterans and the money we put into those poppy boxes provides support and assistance to veterans of the R.C.M.P as well as veterans of Canada's armed forces and their families.

The Legion was formed shortly after WW1 to honour and remember the fallen as well as to help those who survived and the families of all veterans, living or dead. The Legion manages the poppy fund.

Veterans are also honoured by No Stone Left Alone where students place poppies on the headstones of those who have served in the military whether they died in service or lived out their lives as civilians following their period of service to Canada. This will be its thirteenth year and last year. 13,000 students placed poppies on 70,000 graves at 150 Canadian locations.

Remembrance Day parades and ceremonies will be held across the country and the closing of the Remembrance Day ceremony is very poignant. Colours are marched on, there are two minutes of silence after which God

We have Remembrance Day on November 11 because the Armistice to end WW1 was signed at eleven o'clock, November 11, 1918 - the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. November 11 was called Armistice Day until 1946 when its name was changed to Remembrance Day to include the fallen of WW1 and all future wars. The Canadian Virtual War Memorial now lists over 118,000 people who have died in service and will be honoured this Remembrance Day.

Remembrance Day is a legal holiday in both Canada and the United States but in some areas Veterans Day is celebrated on the second Sunday of November and November 8 is often celebrated as Indigenous Veterans Day. Indigenous veterans can have the Medicine Wheel on their tombstones, and if they are Metis, they can have the Infinity Symbol which means "Soul of the World" or "We always existed." The week surrounding Remembrance Day is called Remembrance Week.

Save the King is sung. Then the Last Post and Reveille are played to symbolize the soldier's last duty of sitting sentry (death) followed by his rising above his mortal duties (reveille and ascent into Heaven).

Sometimes amid all the pomp and pageantry we forget that many of the veterans who fought were very young men in their teens and twenties away from home for the first time. Such a group was on a train headed for a training camp in Ontario when the train stopped at Broadview, Sask. in 1914. On the platform there was a girl named Daisy who gave them her goat, Bill, as a good luck charm. The soldiers kept Bill with them throughout training and then hid him in a crate and snuck him into Europe. Bill served with them and was wounded several times. He also became a war hero when he pushed three soldiers into a trench just before a shell exploded. He was awarded the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal, and the Victory Medal. He even took part in a German parade wearing a blue coat with

sergeant stripes.

When the war ended Sergeant Bill was returned to Daisy and lived out his life in Broadview, Sask. After he died Sergeant Bill was stuffed and mounted and he now does museum duty for Canada.

Not all of our war heroes carried guns, either. Indigenous people are justly proud of the Navaho Code Talkers of WW1. The Allies needed a secret code and John Phillip Johnson, who had grown up on a Navaho Reservation, said the Navaho language would be the perfect code because it was unwritten and known to fewer than 30 non-Navaho people. Initially 29 Navaho speakers were trained as Code Talkers but by the end of the war there were 400 Code Talkers, relaying battle plans, enemy positions and other secret information. They contributed to many victories including the Battle of Iwo Jima.

## No, November

by Joanne Bengier

Months come and months go  
And now it is the month of No  
No more wildfires burning  
No more floods churning  
No more deadly heat domes  
No more evacuated homes  
No more smoky mornings  
No more watching warnings

No more storms with hail  
No more alerts that wail  
No more warm breezes blowing  
No more leafy plants growing  
No more weekly lawn mowing  
No more weeding and hoeing  
No more bright flowery sites  
No more pesky mosquito bites  
No more long sunlit nights  
No more wearing cool whites  
No more highways with crews  
No more picnics or barbecues  
No more going with no shoes  
No more festivals for news  
No more Canada goose call  
No more going with no shawl  
No more summer or fall  
No more heat, it's cold for all.  
No more month of November  
We're entering December.



# More than 100 disabled people walked for inclusion

By John Zapantis

Disabled people in Canada were once denied the right of participating in mainstream society. They were often stigmatized as helpless and worthless. They were also often deprived of an opportunity to employment and prevented from having the right in fighting for personal issues.

One day that inevitably changed in their favour, when the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1985 allowed them the legal right to becoming contributing citizens, helping to improve the productive and economic growth of our nation.

The 2023 Citizen's Walk About is a public awareness walk that is a reflection of that historical milestone, recognizing and empowering the disabled, including the rights of others that includes race, colour, creed, sexual orientation, gender and the homeless to an equal opportunity in being inclusive members of Canadian society.

The walk was held at various Alberta cities that operated simultaneously on September 15th in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Brooks and Taber. The popular event, hosted since its first annual run back in 2009 in other parts of Southern Alberta, had four disability organizations that partnered to help in organizing and hosting the 2023 Citizen's Walk About held at Veteran's Park in Medicine Hat Alberta.

This year's theme was "Together We Are Stronger". Several disabilities services societies representing Medicine Hat's disabled, were in attendance for this year's event.

These organizations had information booths on site that provided the event's public free information brochures on their many programs and services offered to the disabled.

The event kicked off with Edmund Camphor, a member of Medicine Hat's disabled community, doing the honours in the singing of O Canada. When the singing of the national anthem ended, Master of Ceremonies Azeez Badrudeen, also a member of the Medicine Hat's disabled

community, introduced various keynote speakers to the stage to give their perspectives on inclusion. The speakers included, Medicine Hat Mayor Linnse Clark, MP for Medicine Hat Cardston and Warner Glen Motz, Redi Enterprises Executive Director Craig Wood, Core Association Manager of Community Services Heather Koboah and two members of Medicine Hat's disabled community, Linda McDonald and Michelle Knaap.

MP for Medicine Hat, Cardston and Warner, Glen Motz, gave his speech and perspective on inclusion for all Canadians, Motz said, "Good morning everyone. It's great to be with you this morning. I appreciate the opportunity and the privilege to walk with you today. What a beautiful day to do that."

"I love the theme of this year's Citizen's Walk About, as has been mentioned,

"Together We Are Strong". It reminds me of some version in the Book of Ecclesiastes. In the bible, Ecclesiastes talks about two people. Where two people are better off than one. For they can help each other to succeed. If one person falls, the other one can help out. If one falls alone, they're in trouble."

"We've all face some difficult challenges in our life, but today is a day to celebrate the resilience that empowers us to overcome the barriers, whatever those barriers may be."

"Canada is a diverse people. We're also a welcoming place. We celebrate the uniqueness of age, race, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, or ability. Each of us has a story to tell. It's the combination of those stories that collectively create an inclusive community." Continued on Page 8



2023 Medicine Hat Citizen's Walkabout walk participants walking for inclusion, walk along 1st Street South East West bound towards the Medicine Hat Public Library and back to end their walk at Veterans Park.

Photo by John Zapantis

## Disabled people walk for inclusion

Continued from page 7

"I'm very proud of the inclusivity that is represented here today. I believe that we all want our neighbourhood, our cities, our province and our country to be a place, where individuals and families are supported and given a chance to thrive, where learning and innovation are encouraged to provide for a brighter future, where compassion, serving others, volunteerism and inclusion are encouraged as part of the fabric of daily life. Where all people are treated with dignity and respect that human beings deserve and that we do unto others as others do unto us."

"I want to live in a place that values equality. That values human rights and inclusion. These principals unite us and our values that are truly a reason to celebrate. We're not created to live our lives in isolation. We're better off in the community."

"As your MP for Medicine Hat, Cardston and Warner, it's my honour to be part of this amazing day. This amazing community and anyone that's represented here today. Let's enjoy the walk today."

Linda McDonald was another member of the disabled community who gave her speech on rising above her own adversity and becoming a successful member of her community. She made great strides in proving many wrong in their doubts about her, McDonald said, "I live with a developmental disability. I'm here today on this special day to talk about people with disabilities throughout Southern Alberta."

"We talked about what we wanted to change. These achievements I have done. Before I start my speech, I'd like to tell you my definition of achievements. Everyone knows my life has not been all challenging. Some of my life hasn't been all achievement, but a lot of challenges."

"My first achievements go hand in hand, going through school and special education and graduating from high school and when the two go hand and hand. If it wasn't for special education, I would have never graduated from high school because of my disability."

"My third achievement was going to the transitional vocation at a training program at Medicine Hat College. I graduated and that's where I met the

special guy named Chuck McDonald."

"My next achievement was marrying my college sweetheart on September 11th, of 2004. My newest achievement, we were told that we were both having learning disabilities and our marriage would never last. Well we proved it could. We proved them wrong. Yes, you heard me. We proved them wrong. We've been married nineteen years."

"My last achievement is my job at Northlands Co-op. My major achievement, maybe one of my new jobs, with a few jobs that I had, I felt I was tested equally and not a person with a disability. I now feel like I'm a part of Co-op's big family."

"I would like to leave you with a quote, 'Achievements seem to be connected with actions. Success for men and women keep moving. They make mistakes, but they do not quit. Karma built it.'"

"To you, I'd like to encourage everyone not to let your challenges discourage you, but to turn them into achievements. Let's get this special day started. Thank you."

The walk started right after the opening ceremonies ended. The walk's starters line had over 100 disabled walkers and their supporters, leaving the starter's line from the Northeast street corner of 6th Avenue Southeast going Westbound along 1st Street Southeast, while the walking participants continued to walk three blocks towards the Medicine Hat Public Library and back to Veteran's Park, where it ended.

When the walk was completed several activities were on hand, where walkers were all treated to an array of activities that included an Aboriginal drum circle, face painting, games and a puppet show.

Food trucks were there to offer their help in feeding the accomplishments of the walkers hungry appetites. Entertainment was also provided to the interested crowds.

The walk successfully brought out more than 100 disabled walk participants who have been participating in this event that's integral to the disabled communities, throughout Southern Alberta since its establishment back in 2009.

Walkers again successfully drove the message home in dispelling the myth about the disabled being incapable and just as an added reminder, always finishing what they start, when given the equal

opportunity in successfully walking to cross the finish line!

## Mary's Good News on American Thanksgiving Day

by Joanne Benger

1. We keep hearing that there are too many unwanted pets. Shelters are overflowing and there are lots of stray cats. This is good news if you want a pet.
2. Food bank use is up and donations are down as people, who used to give, are now asking for help. I think it is nice that they are now being rewarded for their generosity.
3. United Nations is only getting half the donations they used to get so they are having to cut down on food help. This should help solve the world-wide obesity problem.
4. Gasoline prices have gone up again. Staycations and shopping locally are good for the local small businesses.
5. Our prime minister and his wife are separating. That is good news for all you separated people as he will understand your needs better now.
6. Drug use is up. That is good news for drug stores.
7. Donations to thrift stores are down as we are all becoming hoarders of old clothes. It's good to think we are helping the environment by wearing old clothes instead of sending them to landfills.
8. Housing shortages are so great some people have to sleep in their cars. It's nice to know cars are dual-purpose and can double as bedrooms.
9. You have to be on guard because they now make counterfeit loonies and toonies. That means we should look better. If we distrust coins we will carry fewer and our purses and pockets won't get stretched out of shape.
10. Weather experts say our coming winter will be as cold as summer was hot. That is a relief. The heavier the parka the less I have to worry about clothes that are too tight.



# Decima and December

by Joanne Bengner

December got its name because it was the tenth month of the old Roman year, but it is also named for the middle goddess of the Three Fates, Decima, who personifies the present. The Anglo-Saxons called it the Month Before Yule or Winter Month and the Irish called it Mi na Nollag, Christmas Month. December is the end of a cycle, a time of completion that heralds a new year ahead. We celebrate December as National Women's Volleyball Month as well as Family Violence Prevention Month. Weather-wise Christmas Day is the day to watch. If it is warm and summery we'll have a cold Easter with snow and if it's snowing and cold, we'll have good weather for Easter and the coming gardening season.

Dec.1, 1971 Yoko Ono and John Lennon released "Happy Christmas! The War is Over." Give it a listen. Dec.1 is now World AIDs Day. That war is not over yet.

Dec.2 is the first Saturday in December, which is National Impaired Driving Enforcement Day with check stops across the province. "Arrive alive. Don't drink and drive" this holiday season. Dec. 2 is also International Day for the Abolition of Slavery.

Dec.3 is the first Sunday of Advent so hang up your Advent calendar. Advent begins on St. Andrew's Day (Nov.30) or the Sunday nearest it and celebrates the first and second comings of Jesus. The first was his birth in Bethlehem. The second will be his return to judge the world. Dec.3 is also the International Day of Persons With Disabilities as well as Roof Over Your Head Day. Be kind to the less fortunate.

Dec. 4 is International Cheetah Day and this is followed by International Volunteer Day on Dec.5, which is St. Nicholas Eve. In olden times children put out carrots, hay, and straw for St. Nick's horse and would find presents in their place in the morning. Dutch children still set out their shoes which will contain gifts in the morning.

Dec.5 is St. Nicholas Day and National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Honour those who won't be with us this holiday season.

Dec.7 is Pearl Harbour Day and Dec. 8 is the Buddhist Bodhi Day, Rahatso.

Dec. 8-15 will be Hanukkah. During the eight nights of celebrating each house will light 44 candles and recite 17 blessings.

Dec. 8 is Ugly Sweater Day as well as National Brownie Day and Dec.13 is National Cocoa Day. Dec.9 is both Anti-Corruption Day and Pastry Day. Dec.10 is Human Rights Day and Dec. 12 is Poinsettia Day as well as Chipmas Day when chips are eaten for all three meals. Dec. 14 is Monkey Day and Dec. 15 is Cat Herders Day.

Dec.17 is Wright Brothers Day in honour of Wilbur and Orville. Their first flight was 120 feet in 12 seconds.

Dec.19 was St. Nicholas Day on the old calendar when Ukrainian children got presents. Dec.20 is Mothers Night. What we dream this night foretells what will happen in 2024.

Dec.21 is Winter Solstice, which is the first day of winter and the shortest day of the year. It is celebrated world- wide and was once the pagan holiday of Yule.

Dec.25 is Christmas Day. Here's wishing everyone a joyous season. I hope your Christmas is a day of harmony and joy.

Dec.26 is Full Moon, the Long Night or Dropping Horns Moon. It is also the backwoods Cold Moon or Hunting Moon.

Dec.26 the African American celebration of Kwanzaa begins. It will last for seven days and unite all people of African heritage. Families come together and feast for seven nights and gifts are exchanged.

Dec.28 is Childermas Day, the unluckiest day of the year. Don't wear new clothes or start any new projects this day.

Dec.29 is Tic-Tac-Toe Day and Dec.30 is Bacon Day. Relax and enjoy.

Dec.31 is New Years Eve. Set your life in order so you don't carry old baggage into the new year. Prepare for your new start by opening the doors and windows at midnight and rattling to drive off the last of 2023 to make way for 2024. Some people use noisemakers and fireworks and in parts of England, bonfires are lit to burn out the new year. At Hindu temples 108 peals of bells will be rung to drive away all the evils of the old year. It's out with the old and in with the new. Good-bye, 2023. Welcome, 2024, and Happy New Year.

Below: A war monument of a soldier stands proudly in Veterans Park in Medicine Hat. The plaque reads. This monument is erected by its grateful fellow citizens to the everlasting memory of men and women of Medicine Hat and District, who laid down their lives for their country in active service, in the great war of 1914-1918 Lest We Forget-The Second World War-1939-1945-The Korean War-1950-1953.  
Photo By John Zapantis



# The Gifts of Christmas

by Joanne Bengier

Christmas is coming and I am humming,  
I want a hippopotamus for Christmas,  
Only a hippopotamus will do.  
No crocodiles! No rhinoceroses!  
I only like hippopotamuses  
And hippopotamuses like me, too.

It sets the mood for my Christmas shopping. I just know I am jinxed and no matter what I set out to buy I will find that they never stocked it or they are sold out and no more are coming in.

The kindly clerk suggests the croc or the rhino. They are similar, after all, and it is the idea that counts, But I say, only a hippo will do, and I trudge out wearily. I go to store after store after store and all of the hippos on my list fail to turn up. I can't give the almost right rhino or the second best croc. I want the desired gift, the one in the letter to Santa, the one that was circled in the flyer and pointed out on the shopping channel. Santa doesn't substitute. He makes exactly what you want and my standards are Santa's standards.

In the end, I will give gift cards or cash and they will think I was too lazy to shop or I didn't love them enough to spend time shopping for them. Sure, I'll smile and say, "This way you can get more for your money at the Boxing Day Sales", but somehow money does not quite equal a gift in all its wrapping and ribbons.

Then I will open my gifts and see a herd of regifted items that still smell faintly of moth balls plus a few new items that are the obvious last-minute things that stores set out to entice Christmas-eve shoppers. They look great under the tree and that is their sole function. I cross my fingers behind my back as I say the expected Thank-you and insist it is just what I wanted.

Already I am sorting out the crocs and rhinos in my mind. I will keep the gift bags for re-use, and I will donate the gifts to a Thrift Store or homeless shelter. There hopefully my crocs and rhinos will end up as the hippos that other people actually wanted and will use with pleasure. I am just the middle man through whom gifts have to travel to get to their rightful owners.

There may even be a reward for me in the end. A friend told me that all the stuff we give to charities is actually being sent ahead to the next world and will be waiting for us when we arrive. What a wonderful thought! Our generosity will be rewarded. On second thought, just thinking of all those unwanted crocs and rhinos waiting for me makes me wonder if perhaps I would be happier if I ended up in that other place. But no, I tell

myself, it would not be Heaven if we could not appreciate everything there.

I think of all the crocs and rhinos that are loved because of their giver. If we really truly love someone we will love any present that they choose for us. In years to come we will smile and tell people that it was what we received that very special Christmas that we will never forget.

Then I think of the first Christmas I spent with my mother-in-law. She collected cute, little ornaments, and her long-time friend, Flo, collected big realistic ones. On Christmas day the expected happened. My mother-in-law gave Flo a cute little ornament and in turn Flo gave her a huge ornament that looked like it came from her collection. I thought both should have kept the gifts for themselves and they should have given up on exchanging, but then I saw how happy they were. Suddenly, I realized they each had given the other a piece of her heart with something she considered beautiful, and both treasured that knowledge.

## Harambee and Have a Good Kwanzaa

by Joanne Bengier

Kwanzaa begins on December 26 and lasts for seven nights. Kwanzaa is a new holiday with old roots and is celebrated by nearly 20 million in the U.S. It was officially established in America in 1966 by Maulana Karenga, a professor of black studies at California State University. She wanted to unite all people of African heritage living in America and reconnect them with their African heritage. Kwanzaa means "first fruits" and it has been celebrated in some form for thousands of years as a harvest festival in many areas of Africa including ancient Egypt.

Kwanzaa lasts for seven days and the Nguzo lists the seven principles of Kwanzaa, one of each of the seven days.

Day 1 is Umoga or unity. The family joins together to prepare for Karamu.

Day 2 is Kujichagulia or self-determination.

Day 3 is Ujima or working together. The family plans the Karamyuu feast.

Day 4 is Ujamaa or supporting each other in business. The goal of Kwanzaa is to unite people.

Day 5 is Nia or purpose. The purpose is to come together to help others.

Day 6 is Kuumbaa or creativity. This evening is the feast of Karamu when gifts are exchanged amid story-telling, dancing, singing, music, painting, poetry, and all things creative.

Day 7 is Imani or faith. The people must

have faith in each other and the future.

Throughout the seven days of Kwanzaa many traditions are followed. On each of the seven nights families drink from a cup called the Kilumbe Cha Umoja or unity cup, and then the last dregs are poured out in honour of their ancestors..

Traditional and symbolic objects from their past history are placed on a table. Then ears of corn are added to represent future generations.

The colours of Kwanzaa represent unity-red for their common blood, black for the people, and green for the rich lands of Africa. The seven candles of Kwanzaa reflect this unity- 3 red, 1 black, and 3 green.

Greetings may include: "Have a good Kwanzaa", "Have a good Karamu", or "Harambee", which means, "Let's all pull together", for Kwanzaa is a special time when people help each other.

## The traveler

By Angeliqe Branston

A man walks through the forest  
Its trees have lost their leaves, their barren  
branches clothed in twinkling snow  
The night is deep, the snow covered ground  
shines like jewels in the moonlight  
The cold so encompassing  
The path he makes, each step his foot sinks  
down until the snow reaches to his knees.  
He pauses for a moment to catch his breath  
He looks behind him and can clearly see the  
winding trail  
In the deep silence that fills the night  
His days and years of old flash by  
So easily fall away the hurts, the wrongs  
It is in the chances lost  
That makes him hold his chest and bow his  
head  
The earth beckons to him calling gently  
So easy it would be to lie but for a moment  
and rest his weary soul.  
But not for him is allowed the comfort of  
rest, not yet...  
He squares his shoulders looking forward  
once more  
And continues his solitary travels in the  
stillness of the night.





# Plans for The Mustard Seed Control and Medical Respite to open

By Linda Dumont

In March 2023 The Government of Alberta gave a grant to the Mustard Seed to operate in partnership with Radius Community Health and Healing a unique type of centre out of the previous Operation Friendship Seniors Society building at 9526 - 106 Avenue.

There are nearly 3000 people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton. with many located in the downtown core. With winter approaching there is a critical need for spaces so that they can have a safe, warm place to sleep and receive vital support.

Often homeless individuals end up hospitalized with more mild illnesses than the general population because they have nowhere to go. Sometimes minor illnesses worsen because individuals do not have access to basic health supports in early stages. The goals of the health services being provided at the site are to stabilize and support early healing to reduce use of emergency rooms, reduce the length of hospitalization and to promote health.

The centre will remain open year round and guests will have access to a full spectrum of supports and services that aim to address their physical, mental and spiritual needs and to help them grow toward greater health.

Admission to the site will be based on individual behaviour and assessment of the safety of all - so guests will be checked prior to entry, staff and security will be present to monitor behaviour, police and EMS have been notified of the proposal and security cameras are located both inside and outside the building.

Currently they can offer 40 beds on the main floor for guests 55 years and older with Radius Health Services on site for medical supports. If the rezoning is approved there will be 60 beds on the main floor and 32 on the second floor for both men and women and 32 beds for just women on the second floor.

The centre will be open year round. Guests will have access to a full spectrum of supports and services that aim to address their physical, mental and spiritual needs and to help them grow towards

greater health and independence.

The Respite to Recovery Program provided by Radius Community Health and Healing consists of nurse led health and social supports for people experiencing homelessness with medical needs. This is for people who are not ill enough to be admitted to the hospital but are too sick to be in a regular shelter or out on the street. A social worker will be there to connect individuals to a variety of supports such as housing, income support, job search and addiction recovery oriented services that include wound care, medication management and care for pneumonia etc.

## Un named poem

By Angelique Branston

My clothes I wear for me, not for your eyes  
It is not part of some disguise to swindle  
or to cheat.

But merely to provide warmth, nothing  
more.

I do not have a tin for you to place your  
money, I am not begging.

I sell the paper, nothing more

I have never claimed that I was homeless  
Never exaggerated my struggles

If you wish to give me something I am  
grateful and happy to accept.

I understand that there are others

Those who have made their life's work on  
perfecting the art of leeching as much of  
whatever they can get from you.

With flowery words they flatter your ego.  
Their flashing greed filled eyes glitter and  
shine as they see their words like arrows  
hit their mark...

The fake ones seem more real than the real  
ones.

I understand it is easy to be conned.

If you can not tell which I am, I under-  
stand and take no offense

But please just walk on by

I sell the paper

Nothing more.

## Earth

By Angelique Branston

There is nothing that happens upon  
this earth that has not happened before.  
It is not the first time we have gained  
in knowledge and numbers, for it was  
Atlantians use of crystal technology why  
the city and everything around it was torn  
from the earth and plunged to the depths  
of the ocean. Or when the angels fell from  
heaven to be with the daughters of earth,

their beauty too much for the soldiers of  
light and that they would leave their post,  
deny their immortality to lay with this all  
consuming, intoxicating love.

Now seems to be a time of anger and  
violence. The youth rise against their el-  
ders rather than giving a helping hand.  
Nature has been encroached upon too  
long, and now fights back, the coyotes  
have lost too much of their habitat. They  
now pose a threat, because of ones who  
feed them, or try and pet them. Is it any  
wonder that they have lost their natural  
fear of man? That they now attack our little  
pets? Or God forbid our little children?

There are many empty lots within the  
cities - we do not have to build outwards  
anymore, we can build inwards and re-  
vitalize our cities... and leave nature for the  
wildlife.

When nation shall rise against nation,  
and millions lose their lives all of creation  
groans in pain, for we are all connected on  
this earth. If something has breath, or is  
alive it is all joined together. What is born  
of earth, must also return to the earth...  
but the life that was within leaves and we  
return to the one who gave us breath.

It seems as though we are pressed from  
every side. Our finances are strained,  
Our families are falling ill.

Then there are the vultures. The ones  
who feel hard done by, with no compre-  
hension that we are all struggling these  
days, who look upon others and judge, and  
to see what they may take for themselves.  
With not a care for the hardship they are  
scammers and thieves... calling them a  
vulture is an insult to the animal, for at  
least the animal kills to live, for survival  
nothing more. It takes no pleasure in the  
pain it causes nor the grief to the victims  
loved ones...

It is only man who kills for pleasure.

While we can we must remember the  
past, to learn from our mistakes, so we do  
not repeat the sins of those who have gone  
before us.

This knowledge of the past is a privi-  
lege, let us not squander our gifts.

And perhaps look upon one another  
with more patience and understanding.  
May peace be with you always and forever,  
anon.

**I wanted to thank everyone who has  
supported me and my family. I am grate-  
ful. May you have a blessed and merry  
Christmas. And all the best for the new  
year.** Angelique Branston

# Medicine Hat Santa Claus Fund Toy Run brings in \$40,000 and toys for needy children

By John Zapantis

Santa Claus was seen riding on his Honda three wheeled motor cycle acting as a road captain, decked out in sunglasses and looking cool while leading a caravan of 1,050 motorcycle riders out the front entrance of the Irvine Hotel in Irvine Alberta, helping to kickoff the 37th Annual Santa Claus Fund Toy Run on September 9th, 2023.

The toy run was hosted and organized by the Motor Cycle Enthusiasts Group, notably an amalgamation of biker clubs that love to ride together.

The long line of bikers with toys mounted on the backs of their bikes took off from the Irvine Hotel in the hamlet of Irvine, Alberta, at 11:30 a.m. on a 35 kilometres ride that lasted for about 20 minutes. They arrived at Medicine Hat's Exhibition and Stampede (GER) grounds, roaring up and stopping to park their bikes in front of Higdon Hall.

This mass arrival of happy bikers, met up for a happy good time celebration in honouring their generous contributions to the toy run.

The toy run kicked off its earlier celebration with a morning pancake breakfast held at 9 a.m., hosted by the Irvine Hotel in Irvine Alberta.

Bikers paid for their hardy breakfast, with proceeds from the sales of the breakfast donated to the Santa Claus Fund.

Each year at this time of the season, the Santa Claus Fund makes a public plea for everyone to make that generous donation to needy children, who very much appreciate a donated toy and some money under the Christmas tree at Christmas time.

When the ride was completed, once the bikers arrived to Medicine Hat, they all started walking into Higdon Hall on the Exhibition and Stampede grounds, where they treated themselves to a variety of activities that in-

cluded a 50/50 draw, a silent auction, beer gardens, hamburger, fries and a drink.

Proceeds from the purchases of the 50/50, silent auction, drinks and food were all donated to the Santa Claus Fund.

A live band was on stage providing musical entertainment, in helping to celebrate this special occasion.

Bikers Kathy Pollock and her boyfriend Wayne Dyck were on the Exhibition and Stampede grounds, celebrating their ride to bring a toy to the toy run.

Pollock gave her views on this year's event to ASN. She's been a participant rider and donor of this event for over 20 years. The young biker has risen above her own adversity and knows what it means to be donating a toy and riding for the cause on behalf of those less fortunate, Pollack said, "I know there's a lot of people that struggle now a days. There's a lot of kids that don't have anything. It makes me feel good to be able to donate for such a wonderful cause."

She'll tell you herself, she's not donating, because she feel more fortunate than those in need. Pollock said, "No, I didn't have it better. That's just me. I just like to give to people that need help in anyway I can"

Santa Claus also got in on the action for our interview. He was situated at a tent

that was designated as the Santa Claus Fund toy depot, where bikers dropped off their donated toys for children.

For a designated road captain, who decided to leave his reindeer behind, while leading on a 'Christmas Spirit Motor Cycle Club' of 1,050 bikers into the Exhibition and Stampede grounds, he sure knows how to show his human side. In our interview, Santa said, "Well, you know what? All of the toys are going to be stored to be able to help kids at Christmas time and given out. Mrs. Claus is actually back at the North Pole, helping the elves, because they're behind in the workshop. So they need to get some of their work done. She's helping out. That's why she's not here today."

Santa Claus Fund Toy Run Promotions Director Heather McCaig was more than pleased with this year's event. She had this to say about the generosity of bikers, who keep making the wishes of children come true during the Christmas season. McCaig said, "I really believe that bikers have a huge heart. You know our community has always been so amazing in stepping up in helping with things like this. So I'm confident that our community will step up again. Last year we gave away stuff to more than 700 families at Christmas.

Below: For the 37th annual Santa Claus Fund Toy Run, Road Captain Santa Claus leads the way into the exhibition and stampede grounds for more than for more than 1,050 bikers.

Photo By John Zapantis





**the Santa Claus Fund always gives out grocery vouchers so families could have Christmas dinners as well.**

**Organizers, volunteers and of course the bikers, all worked together as Santa's substitute elves, in helping Santa in showing the Spirit of Christmas, helping to make the wishes of children come true, when presents of cash and toys are finally given to the children, from under the Christmas tree!**

## Thanks to that trouble shooter computer angel Marlene for saving my bacon

By John Zapantis

Every library is especially equipped to have a computer trouble shooter on hand, who is notable for getting computer users out of trouble, when computers for some unknown reason stubbornly refuse to get you to the next program, despite doing things correctly.

I know, I've had my share of computer fumbles, while falling through those cyber cracks.

One of those many moments of frustration would re-occur, when I'd made an effort in typing in my Yahoo account program's password, while typing in my many stories for the Alberta Street News provincial street newspaper, funded by our Founder/Publisher/Editor Linda Dumont.

My dead end would happen, when an alert advisory message on my computer screen would show me that my Yahoo account password was typed in incorrectly.

Whenever that would happen, the Yahoo account support service would advise me to phone their 24 hour service provider, knowing that the person on the other end of this failed attempt to type in their password might possibly be a hacker disguised as an original account holder.

So to avoid the possibility of my information and files being stolen, Yahoo had me verify, if I was the original account holder on the other end of this computer.

Many a times, while going through this re-awakening of a computer problem, I'd consult with the librarian, Marlene, who would then show me the steps of how to consult with the 24 hour Yahoo service provider and helping me to get my Yahoo program re-activated.

When that problem returned, my PTSD would return, causing me to panic, causing my thinking to come to an abrupt stop.

That's when I went back to consulting with

one of the more reliable librarians known as Marlene, who'd often assist me in getting back on track.

She would always re-introduce me to the Yahoo 24 hour service provider line. She would then suggest that I phone for their assistance and ask for a service provider, asking them for a secret code number that Yahoo would send to me on my cell phone.

As soon as that code number arrived to my phone, the instructor would then advise me to type the code number where I usually type in my Yahoo password in opening up that program to write my stories for the Alberta Street News.

Finally, I was back on track. My program opened up and I was now typing in another informative and entertaining piece for our newspaper.

Thanks to the Medicine Hat Public Library's staff member and trouble shooting specialist, Marlene, who has always managed to get me back on track on more than one occasion, while saving my bacon!

## Where would I be without the Medicine Hat Mustard Seed

By John Zapantis

Lets face it, where would we homeless people be if it weren't for the Medicine Hat Mustard SEED's shelter taking the homeless into their shelter. There are various reasons why people end up homeless and at times through no fault of their own.

After having had a falling out with a female relative, while previously living in Edmonton at my parent's home and looking after them as a caregiver, the constant arguing with that relative, who also works as a caregiver for my mother, had me out the door and homeless in no time.

It was the honourable thing to do, to respect my mother's wishes, when she suggested that I find my own place to save her the worry of having to tolerate the ongoing dissension, between my relative and me. So off I went to Calgary. I've been homeless since March of 2022.

Since then I've moved around homeless throughout Alberta. I've also resided at two other Mustard SEED shelters that included the Red Deer Mustard SEED and Medicine Hat Mustard SEED. I moved to Medicine Hat on June 1st of this year.

I've had the convenience of a diverse range of supports and services offered to me while staying at this homeless shelter, located at 737-8th Street South East. Staying at a shelter isn't that

bad of an experience. After all, we've given a wake-up call of our choosing. I've had many of them through the hard working staff, who are diligently working their wonders, when sweeping the floors and mopping them. They'll make certain that our showering and toilet facilities are always ready to greet us, by sweeping and mopping those rooms early in the morning, before everyone awakens to start their day.

I've been awakened by their many staff members. Sometimes I'd get a wake-up call at 5 a.m. or 6 a.m., depending on when I asked for a wake-up call.

I'd never hesitate to be up for the call, rushing up from my dorm's cot, getting my clothes that were stored in my locker, greeted by a staff locker attendant, who'd be more than willing to drop what they were in the middle of doing other tasks and would make the immediate exception of opening my locker.

That's all I need to start my day - getting dressed up and heading out for a day of writing stories for the Alberta Street News. After my day has been completed, while writing stories for our paper, I'd then head back to the Mustard SEED at 8 p.m. every evening, where I currently reside. There I'm checked over by staff for any suspicious contraband, just before going to my locker and heading for a shower.

The opening hours of that shelter are from 3:30 p.m. to 3 a.m. Monday through Sunday. Bedtime is at 10 p.m.

Smoke breaks run throughout the day up to 10 p.m., where shelter guests walk over to the shelter's backyard, and join a smoking circle, for a smoke and friendly conversation.

On the weekends you can sleep in for as long as you wish. At 8 a.m. On Saturdays and Sundays all shelter residents are joined on the second floor dining room, where staff serves breakfast to its guests. Lunch is offered to its residents at 12 noon on weekends and supper starts at 5 p.m. with a bedtime snack that's offered between 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The weekday schedule for supper at the Mustard SEED shelter is from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. There are also other options where you can go for breakfast dinner and supper over to the Mustard SEED Impact Centre located at 503 A-Allowance Avenue South East. The centre's breakfast hour starts at 8 a.m, lunch is at 12 noon and supper starts at 5 p.m.

So to pay a tribute to these many hard working souls who work out of the Mustard SEED shelter, I'd like to commend them for making my stay a convenience.

The following staff at this shelter include Gabriel, Danny, Cristal, Roland, Robert, Steve, Eldhose, (better known to shelter guests as Jo) Allen and Tristan.

You're all a 'One of a kind' for the job you do and enjoy coming to, when making that big difference.

Just from what I know about your passion for this particular job, God certainly had a special calling for all of you. Thanks for making that big difference for me.

# The Christmas Angel

**fiction by Sharon Austin**

Pale winter sunlight flooded in the tall window and stole across the bed gently touching the lined face of the old woman and turning the cat's dull orange fur to gold. A tiger-striped cat lay draped across the pillow above her head as it purred softly in the stillness. It was a scene of perfect peace; a small sparkle of heaven amid the chaos of earth.

As the sunlight strengthened, Maisie awoke and smiled as she glanced around the sunlit room. Her new apartment was just what she had dreamed of; three big newly painted rooms and her own bathroom. At her old place she had only two rooms and a shared bathroom down the hall. The other tenant played loud country music long into the night and she was afraid to complain as he had quite a temper.

When the city declared the rooming house unfit and slated it for tear-down she had been frantic to find a new place that she could afford and that would allow pets. She could have stayed at a shelter for a few weeks but what would have become of Charlie and Tiger? A woman of faith, Maisie had prayed for hours on this matter and the Lord had found her a perfect place.

It was even closer to the senior centre where she went sometimes to meet her friends. She was looking forward to the big Christmas dinner they hosted every year and the presents and candy. The dinners were always man-sized and delicious and she would fold the extra turkey into her napkin to take home to her boys.

Sometimes she thought about the old days when Herb was still alive and Doreen was just a little girl and she wished she could go back in time and relive every moment of her memories. Herb had been gone for 20 years now and Doreen had married and moved to New Zealand.

Maisie looked forward to her yearly fancy card and letter with a crisp fifty-dollar bill slipped inside.

After breakfast Maisie decided to take a walk around her new neighbourhood.

The cats were both asleep on the wide window sill of the front -room window, obviously approving of their new living space.

It was two weeks until Christmas but the weather was still warm enough that she didn't need winter boots or her long down coat. Cutting through the back alley on her way to the park, Maisie saw a small cardboard parcel lying in the gutter amid the dry brown leaves. The box had been ripped open and two presents at the top were haphazardly torn apart to reveal a pretty pink hairbrush and a crushed box of chocolates. The chocolates that had spilled out were grey with age and inedible.

"Whoever had stolen the parcel had not liked what they had found and had thrown it in the back alley," Maisie thought as she picked it up. "Surely it belonged to one of the houses nearby."

Looking at the address she was shocked to find that the address was Ambrosia Lane in Ocean View Court. That was way up the mountain where the rich folks lived in their gated mansions. How could the parcel have ended up in the gutter so far away?

On closer inspection, Maisie saw that it had been mailed on December 5, 2016 in Shadowing Pines, British Columbia. "That was seven years ago," she thought, "This really is a mystery!"

She decided to take it home and try to find a phone number for this Laurelei Winters. An hour later Maisie gave up combing through the phone book. There was no Laurelei Winters or any other Winters listed in Ocean View Court.

"This child deserves her presents," Maisie said to her cats.

She had started talking to them as if they were two little friends that understood her every word. "I think I will take the bus up there and deliver this parcel; it will be a real adventure for me that I can tell my friends about at Christmas.

Tucking the small parcel into a reusable bag, Maisie set out on her adventure. The bus ride was not pleasant as the buses were crowded with holiday shoppers and she had to transfer twice. Someone had been smoking marijuana recently and the sickening sweet smell hung in the air. The buses did not run all the way up to the gated communities so

Maisie had to walk the last four blocks.

Soon she was standing at the gate of a beautiful white mansion with tall pillars stretching up to the sky. The grounds were well manicured and a few hardy flowers still bloomed in the vast flower beds. Seeing a buzzer at the gate, she pressed it hoping that someone would answer.

Maisie jumped as a man's voice boomed, "Yes, May I help you?"

"I have a parcel for Miss Lorelei Winters," she said firmly.

"Parcels go around the back," the voice boomed again as the gate slid soundlessly open. "Just leave it on the back steps,"

"I have to explain about the parcel," Maisie stammered. She did not like talking to an intercom system.

"You mean it is special delivery? Why didn't you say so in the first place. I will text Laurelei to meet you around the back."

Maisie felt very out of place as she walked down the long, paved driveway. She laughed to herself as she thought how shocked the gate-keeper must be to see an old woman walking and delivering the parcel. She imagined herself saying, "Even the courier companies have fallen on hard times, sir," as a wry smile tugged at her lips.

At the back of the house a tall beautiful girl with long flowing blonde hair stood waiting. "I wasn't expecting a parcel," she said sweetly and her eyes widened as she saw the damaged parcel in Maisie's hands.

"It's a real mystery, miss," Maisie began. "I found this parcel already opened in the gutter behind my apartment. Even stranger, according to the postmark it was mailed seven years ago. I thought it might be important to you."

"Seven years," Laurelei half whispered as the colour drained from her cheeks.

"Come," she said to Maisie sensing she was tired. "Let's sit in the garden while I open my parcel. It's from Cole, the wonderful guy I met the summer I was eighteen. I was not supposed to socialize with the college students that were working for the summer but they seemed to have all the fun. My friend's brother invited us to one of their beach parties and my parents weren't home so I went along. They had a big



bonfire burning and bright sparks were flying up into the dark sky. I saw this handsome guy sitting by the fire roasting a hotdog and when he saw me standing there in the shadows, he dropped the stick and came toward me. His eyes never left my face and he asked me if I was real or an angel descended to earth. It was love at first sight for both of us and we spent every moment that we could together. I knew my parents wouldn't approve of him as he wasn't rich so we tried to keep our love a secret."

As Laurelei spoke, she gently unwrapped the third present. Inside was a dainty sterling silver angel necklace. "It's so beautiful," Laurelei whispered as she pushed back her hair to secure the tiny clasp.

The last present was a pale blue journal with butterflies on the front and bright gold script that read "May all your dreams come true."

At the bottom of the box was a Christmas card and a letter. Tears poured down her cheeks as she read the handwritten pages.

Suddenly a very angry woman strode into the garden. "Laurelei, I've been looking for you all over the house. We have to see if you brought a suitable dress for your father's dinner party. What on earth are you doing out here with this homeless person?"

"She brought me a parcel mother, only seven years too late. How could you have hidden this from me when you knew how broken-hearted I was that Cole left without saying good-bye. He wrote that father went to his work and told him I had left for college and wanted to break things off with him. Father even threatened him not to try to contact me or there would be consequences."

Laurelei's mother crossed her thin arms across her chest defensively. "You should be thanking us," she fumed. "You had no future with that young man no matter how great you thought he was. It's the classic rich girl, poor boy romance story that never ends well. Besides, he's probably married to someone like himself and has five kids by now. We did the right thing by protecting you."

The angry woman turned to Maisie. "Where did you find that box, she questioned. "The "Got Junk" people cleaned out the shed and that should have ended up in the dump! You should leave now; you have made enough trouble here."

Maisie walked slowly down the long driveway toward the gate. She had thought the lost parcel would bring joy; instead, it had torn a family apart.

"Wait, Mam," Laurelei called to her. "I want to take you to lunch and drive you home."

The meal had been wonderful, and Maisie and Laurelei talked for two hours. Laurelei promised to let her know how the story ended.

"Things must not have gone well for sweet Laurelei," Maisie said to the cats after a week had passed with no word. "Still, I'm glad we took her the parcel and Cole did say he would always love her in the letter."

The very next day, Maisie received a card from Laurelei. Opening the card, she found a wedding invitation and a letter asking her to be the special guest at the spring wedding of Laurelei and Cole.

"You are the special Christmas Angel that brought us back together," Laurelei had written.

Folded in pink tissue paper Maisie found a dainty gold angel necklace. "What a wonderful story I will have to tell my friends at the Christmas dinner," Maisie thought."

Imagine me being someone's Christmas angel!"

## Thanks to Country Crumbs Bakery and Cafe for donated donuts

By John Zapantis

The owner of Country Crumbs Bakery and Cafe, whose been in business since 2021 is the obvious example of how character reflects on the variety of freshly baked goods that are routinely showcased in the bakery's front glass display case.

This humble and soft spoken owner never fails to accommodate the essential needs of his regular customers and first time clients, impressed by his diverse range of baking

products.

I should know. I've known this self-taught businessman and master baker, Mr. Joe Desjardins, since first arriving to Medicine Hat back in June 1st of this year.

It's obvious from what I've heard of his evolution as a self taught businessman and baker that his effective baking skills have inevitably earned him his ranking as one of the most in demand baker suppliers to other neighboring restaurants in Medicine Hat and other businesses that straddle the Southern Alberta belt line.

I was more than impressed by their hard working staff's determination in stepping up to the plate one day back in the first week of September, when one of their employees, Angela, offered me a free complimentary box of assorted donuts.

She suggested that I take them over to the Mustard SEED and share them all with the homeless where I currently reside, while living there temporarily until I find a permanent place of my own.

I was advised by Angela that if I didn't take the offering that the donuts would be thrown away so I did the honourable thing and accepted the kind offering.

I was also told by the lady that their bakery was notable for constantly donating its left over diverse range of baked donuts to the Salvation Army.

Knowing that I'm a loyal client of theirs, it was the best way that they could honour and express their appreciation for me.

In my books, the owner's heart surpasses his natural skill set as a self-made businessman and master baker.

If there's a time you decide to get a little curious about the thought of trying Country Crumbs Bakery products, for starters, I'd recommend the wide selection of well flavoured and rich textured donuts that sit proudly in the bakery's donut display case.

Some of those for starters include Boston sour cream, glazed chocolate, coconut donuts and more of another variety of baked products waiting to be discovered by a hungry and determined appetite.

Joe Desjardin's well organized business operation and his gifted skill at the art of baking have inevitably paid off.

He's earned numerous best baking awards that include Best Baker in Medicine Hat for the year 2023 by the Medicine Hat News and his most recent 2nd place ribbon as a contestant of the Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede Canada Day Cake Decorating Competition.

# Celebration of Alberta Street News 20th Anniversary

By Linda Dumont

We will be gathering at 9420 - 92 Street in the social room on November 25 at 6 p.m. for a pot luck dinner to celebrate 20 years of publication of Alberta Street News. If you are interested in joining our celebration, just drop by and bring something to share for the dinner.

Poets will be sharing their poetry and writers their stories and anecdotes from the paper, so if you have anything to share, feel free to contribute whether it is a song, a dance, a poem or a story.

Its been a long run for the paper, and it is not over yet! As Allan Sheppard once said, "We keep doing what we can as long as we can."

## Remembering Christmas Past

By Angelique Branston

One Christmas season when I was a young child, when my little sister was a baby, we lived on a little farm, my mom, little sister, older brother, and me. My exfather was living in the city with his lover so there was a nice peace to our house. He took all the money that the government gave for us to live on and spent it on himself. We had power, but our pump had frozen solid (not that we ever had running water in that house). You see it was a little electric water pump placed in an uninsulated shed so of course when the weather got too cold the pump would freeze and my mom and brother would have to walk two miles into town to fill up our big water bottles. They pulled me on the shed and carried my little sister on their chest wrapped up in a warm snow suit tied on with a snuggly. To make our drinking and cooking water last longer we would gather basins of snow and melt it to use it for bathing and washing our hair. The snow water always made my hair very shiny and soft like silk.

We had a bath once a week at this time. In the winter time we would put the big square wash tub in the living room.

We would go outside to gather buckets of snow which would then be melted on top of the stove.. We had a bath once a week at this time. In the winter time we would put the big square wash tub in the living room. My little sister was propped up in a car seat still in her snow suit under a blanket in front of the oven with the door wide open so that the heat would take the chill out of the air. Our gas had been cut off so our heat came from

## Christmas Tongue Twisters

by Joanne Bengner

1. Candy cane cookies keep kids coming.
2. Susie stops at the Christmas shop where I shop. If Susie stops at the Christmas shops where I shop, I won't shop at the Christmas shops where Susie stops.
3. Santa sings shining star songs.
4. Santa's super souped-up sleigh swiftly slides sideways.
5. Ninety-nine naughty knitted St. Nick knick-knacks were nicked by ninety-nine naughty knitted St. Nick knick-knack nickers.
6. Cheery cute carolling Christmas critters.

the electric stove in the kitchen and the oven.

My brother would have his bath first. Then my mom would help me to bathe. I always wanted to go out quickly so she would gently rub my back and knees. She would tell me stories like Cinderella and Rumpstiltskin, though not the watered down versions but with the gritty details like when the one where the evil sister from Cinderella cut off her big toes so that her feet could fit into the glass slippers. The prince caught her because of the blood trail from her feet.

She would patiently listen and answer questions I might have. After my bath, my mom would bathe, afterwards my mom and brother would take the wash basin outside and dump it on the ground. Washing our hair was much easier, it would take two small basins of snow one to rinse out the shampoo, and one to rinse out the conditioner.

After washing my hair, for special occasions my mom would take pieces of rags and wind my hair up, and tie it into place. My mom would ask me what story I would like and I usually picked Rumpstiltskin, it would take about an hour for my mom to finish making all the ringlets.

Because we had no heat we all would sleep in the master bedroom, the four of us snuggled together under one blanket, which was pulled up to cover our heads as well. Our body heat kept us warm.

On Christmas day I was amazed to find a mandarin orange in my sock along with candies and nuts. We had no oranges so Santa must have given them to us.

My mom fed me breakfast and as I ate I would listen to more stories as she took out each carefully placed in rag. When

## Christmas Feasting

by Joanne Bengner

This is not the cold winter in Narnia. We even have Christmas in Sarnia. It's the time of the Great Too Much. Empty out the cupboards and hutch. Christmas is our Over-Eating Day, The calorie counter's Cheating Day. Eat, eat, eat and eat some more, Dieting is always such a bore. You should gain five pounds at least Enjoying every morsel of the feast. Boxing Day is Eat Even More Day, And for a week you can eat away; But then Eat Like a Piggy Month Becomes Diet Like a Twiggy Month. To eat was divine, to diet not so, But those five pounds have to go.

they had all been removed I would have beautiful ringlets when we went to see out aunties and uncles later that day. We gathered on boxing day, at my great uncle John's house in Leduc. He had what seemed like a hundred cats, he knew each one's name and their likes and dislikes. It was a day filled with joy. I loved visiting with my cousin who was six months older than me.

The past few weeks had been peaceful and restful. The family gathering completing one of the best Christmas days I can remember.

That night when we arrived home my exfather's truck was in the driveway and the living room light was on. The nice warm safe feeling fell away. He was back. The heat was on inside. That night I slept in my bed upstairs with the wall paper animals, whose eyes gleamed in the night, and I fell asleep listening to his drunken yelling fit. But he could not take away the precious memories made in his absence.... we had an amazing Christmas season.

It is not what you have it is who is with you. It is better to live in want and nourish the soul than to lack for nothing but starve the spirit.



Photo by John Zapantis