

Voices In My Head: Cabin Fever

By P.J. O’Leary

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Power has been out for two days, 36 inches of snow is stacked outside the door and it continues falling at about one inch per hour. There’s a stew on the woodstove with some carrots, potatoes and a few choice bits of what’s left of the neighbor’s Highland Terrier. We were lucky enough to capture her when her little legs got stuck in a snowdrift yesterday afternoon. At this point, only the craftiest of neighborhood pets have avoided becoming entrees. Dogs and cats, bunnies and parakeets; all have given their lives to preserve humanity in this tiny snow-bound community.

The citizenry, while not openly admitting to thoughts of cannibalism, seem to look at each other with either fearful suspicion or gluttonous desire, depending on their degree of desperation. Mothers cling tightly to children for fear that they might wander off and be snatched by a voracious stranger. People left with precious few resources save for a bottle of Sweet Baby Ray’s Award-Winning Barbecue Sauce will, in time, develop a distorted view of the traditional food-chain.

The Oregon National Guard completed a successful aerial drop at Spencer Park a few days ago, but before relief volunteers could secure the cache, it was stolen by the packs of Middle Schoolers who now inhabit the woods around town, living like wolves and pouncing upon the weak and vulnerable. Law enforcement has long since given up trying to maintain order, as even gangs of Cub Scouts have traded in their merit badges for lives of pillaging and generally disruptive behavior.

The Mayor and City Council have barricaded themselves inside City Hall, hoping to keep the hordes of hungry, raging townspeople at bay until federal troops arrive. More later---

So, how was your New Year’s? I’m not that much for resolutions, but I have decided that I’m going to spend less time worrying about what people think. You know how sometimes you feel like you might have a loose booger so you find a mirror to do a quick booger check? It’s never there when you look in the mirror. It’s when you’re not worried about it that you have one hanging out, flapping like a wind sock at a Seaside summer cottage.

Or, say you’re sitting in one of those vinyl waiting room chairs at the dentist’s office and you move your leg. The resulting squeak sounds uncomfortably like the noise one makes when he is suffering from a personal gas crisis. Three people look at you and smile and shake their heads. You immediately endeavor to move your leg around again hoping that by duplicating the noise it will become apparent to everyone that the sound was not what they assumed. Of course, you can’t repeat the noise, so you’re left with that burning little ting of embarrassment.

From now on when that happens, I’m just going to smile back and give them my best Sarah Palin wink.

On The Shelves: What’s Happening At Vernonia Library

By Nancy Burch

A parent in Halsey, Oregon, recently complained about the book entitled “Book of Bunny Sui-cides” and threatened to burn it. To date, the Central Linn School Board is divided on the issue of keeping the book or removing it from the library. The issue of censorship can be found in Vernonia’s library board minutes in 1944 when “There was a discussion of the suitability of detective stories for the library, a topic presented by the librarian. She was directed to write the state librarian concerning this matter.” Although no further mention could be found concerning this matter, “detective stories” did become part of the library’s collection. In the last twenty years, the issue has only arisen a few times and mainly in connection with youngsters (what they can check out or in regard to Internet use). We follow the guidelines of the American Li-brary Association, whose belief is that “the primary responsibility for rearing children rests with parents. If parents want to keep certain ideas or forms of expression away from their children, they must assume the responsibility for shielding those children. Governmental institutions cannot be expected to usurp or interfere with parental obligations and responsibilities when it comes to what a child may read or view.” Our Internet policy is pretty much along the same lines—Parents must read and sign a permission slip for any youngster under the age of 18 before they are allowed to use the library’s Internet terminals. We do not have filters and recommend parents use their best judgment when signing these permission slips.

Because library materials have not been exempt from scrutiny and challenges, the Oregon State Library established the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse in 1987. This central clear-ing house collects reports about challenges to library materials. (These challenges and actions taken may be found on the Oregon State Library website.) Challenges against library materi-als reported to this Clearinghouse have included Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark by Alvin Schwartz, A Light in the Attic by Shel Silverstein, Wrinkle in Time by Madeline L’Engle, The Horse Whisperer by Nicholas Evans, Dragonquest by Anne McCaffrey, and Draw Me a Star by Eric Carle. As you can see, most of these books are mainstays of library collections. Rea-sons for challenges include political content, sexual expression, or language offensive to some people’s racial, cultural, or ethnic background, gender or sexuality, or political or religious be-liefs. Materials considered obscene or inappropriate for children have often been challenged. Materials are usually retained with no change, but some are reclassified from juvenile to adult, with very few actually being removed from libraries.

At the same time, there are certain categories of speech such as obscenity, child pornography, defamation, and “fighting words,” or speech that incites immediate and imminent lawless action that are not protected by the First Amendment and may be censored.

Be assured that librarians are not censoring when they choose not to buy materials for the li-brary. Expense, space, and lack of community interest are the main reasons patrons may not find everything they wish in the library. Ask for material not found on the shelves and if it’s possible, it will be made available. Libraries strive to serve the interests of the entire community.

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