

# New in Town: Seasons Heavings and a Joyful New Year

By Shannon Romtvedt

Along with presents, family members passed around the flu this Christmas. I don't recommend the gift exchange, but it's hard to avoid once the cute little toddler gets the bug. I've spent nine wonderful, mostly-white Christmases in Eastern Oregon and despite nausea, we had a great time once again. Nevertheless, before leaving my in-laws house, we all decided to have Christmas in Vernonia next year to try something new. I agreed heartily, wishing I could beam myself, husband, and vehicle there immediately. Eight hours later, my wish was granted.

To say I was "never so happy to be home" is a slight exaggeration, but it captures the feeling I had pulling into my driveway. I'd driven most of the day in the snow/rain/ice with queasy husband in the passenger seat. My neck and back ached wretchedly from tensing in statue position and my head was raging. I'm not known for driving prowess on a good day, and the combo of poor road

conditions and illness took its toll.

Thankfully, downtown Vernonia is cheery and festive in December, brightening weary travelers as they make their way home. I appreciate everyone's hard work and holiday spirit and I'm looking forward to the opportunity to spend December close to home next year. I enjoy the lights and decorated windows in downtown businesses and love driving across the bridge at night to see the red and green lanterns. On our way home from work, my husband and I cheer bright houses and boo "humbug streets." Nothing against bulbless homes, but an entire neighborhood without a single twinkle? Baffling.

A few days before Christmas, my husband and I hosted our first solstice party. Among other things, we had a Yule log, a lunar eclipse, and a toast to the upcoming year. On the Yule Log, attendees tucked two notes under a string, one with something they wanted to leave behind and one with something to embrace. While watching the notes sizzle in the fire, I wondered why we

burn what we desire along with our cast-offs. Seems like it would be more appropriate to eat the paper or tattoo the words to a body part, not that I offered up either suggestion.

New Year's Day, I took a walk with my husband up Keasey Road in search of a fresh route. It's easy to find a new trail to hike at this point because there are so gosh darn many. We steered off the main drag to the right and plodded a ways up an overgrown logging road. Five steps past elk prints and droppings, we found an animal trail clearly cut up a steep hillside. We followed the trail, amazed to find switchbacks. Makes sense that a hoofed beast would need to take a turn or two to break up the incline, but it's the first time I thought about it.

After scrambling up a half mile or so, I stepped up onto the ridge and then onto a stump, just to be on the highest point possible. Like most viewpoints in the surrounding areas of Vernonia, it was varied and beautiful. Open fields in the valley with a spattering of rooftops, rolling hills with different stages of tree

growth, dustings of snow and mist in the distant mountains.

Instead of sliding down the way we came, we looped around and found another road home. Snow still covered paths on the ridge, making it easy to spot tracks. We followed a coyote chasing a bunny back and forth along the road. Four thick lines scooped together into a bunch every few human steps, followed closely by a small paw or two. In my story, the bounding bunny tricked the cagey coyote and made an escape. There was no evidence to prove me wrong.

I'm not sure if revealing a Yuletide wish is bad luck. Words burned brightly in flame for a reason. But I'll take a risk and share with you my hope for 2011. I want to carry joy into the New Year. I want to experience joy in little moments throughout the day, in sharing good times with family, friends, and neighbors, and in appreciating the mystery, magnificence, and story in nature. As far as I can tell, I think I'm off to a good start.

## THE INK WELL

By Lynn Berry

The New Year has arrived. Most of the holiday decorations have been tucked away, and thoughts of the past year are now shifting toward the year ahead.

Although the holidays have passed, we are still able to carry on the magical qualities that the holidays awaken within each of us, such as kindness, tolerance, charity, and lovingness. As most know, our actions, small or large, affect the universe in ways not yet understood, similar to a pebble being dropped in a pond; the pebble being dropped is our actions, and the ripple effects of the water are the result of those actions, moving out from the source to far and beyond.

Writing is much like this as well. As history has shown, the pen can be a powerful source to express, change, move, and create the ripples needed within ourselves, others, and our community, reaching even further than we ever intended. All you need to do is pick up a pencil, pen or start clattering on the keyboard, and get writing! Again, I urge all of you to practice this incredible, beautiful, and powerful art form.

Below, local resident, Joan Gailic, has written an inspiring poem titled "Always," very apropos for

the New Year. In Gailic's poem, the difficulties of achieving one's aspirations are paired with the hope of perseverance in tightly-rhymed couplets. This is an excellent example of how poetic structure can reinforce and strengthen the meaning of the poem. Just as struggle and perseverance are joined inextricably with hope, so too are Gailic's lines drawn together by a rhyme scheme that keeps them united to a single theme.

Always

Always have hope in the things that you do  
Always believe that you can make it through  
Remember the past and learn as it teaches  
And you'll grasp wisdom's hand as it unfolds and reaches  
Look towards the future with no worry or fears  
For living each day brings it's own many tears  
Reach to the heavens, follow your dreams  
We'll keep going on no matter how hard it seems  
Our life is not over till we take our last breath

There will be much we can do till the second of death  
So keep up your spirit and live life with love  
Remembering that no matter what we can always rise above

----- Joan Gailic

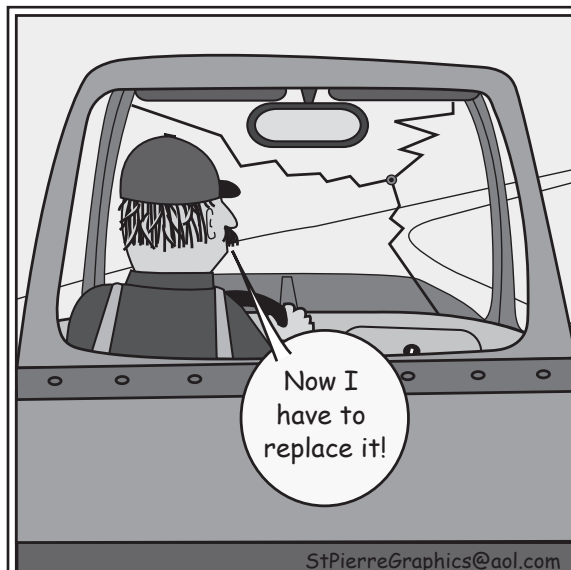
---**Writer's Idea:** Write a piece, from your own experience, where you were inspired to move onto another path in your life's journey. Many of us have experienced these shifts and have stories to tell. When we tell them, we all learn from one another.

---**Writer's Tip:** Rhyming can be a way to create rhythm and interest in your poem or lyric. Start by writing only two lines, making sure the last words rhyme, and then continue from there. You will soon be surprised how this method sparks the creative-self living deep within each one of us!

---Please send your original submissions to, (or if you would like a copy of any of the published poems in their entirety), [InkwellVernonia@msn.com](mailto:InkwellVernonia@msn.com) or by mail: PO Box 333 Vernonia, OR 97064. Please include your name and contact information. Write—Express--Expand.

Lynn Berry holds an M.A. in English, specializing in feminist literature and literary criticism. She has spent several years teaching Literature, Composition, Poetry, Creative Writing, and Critical Thinking at various school districts and colleges, and occasionally provides writing workshops.

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